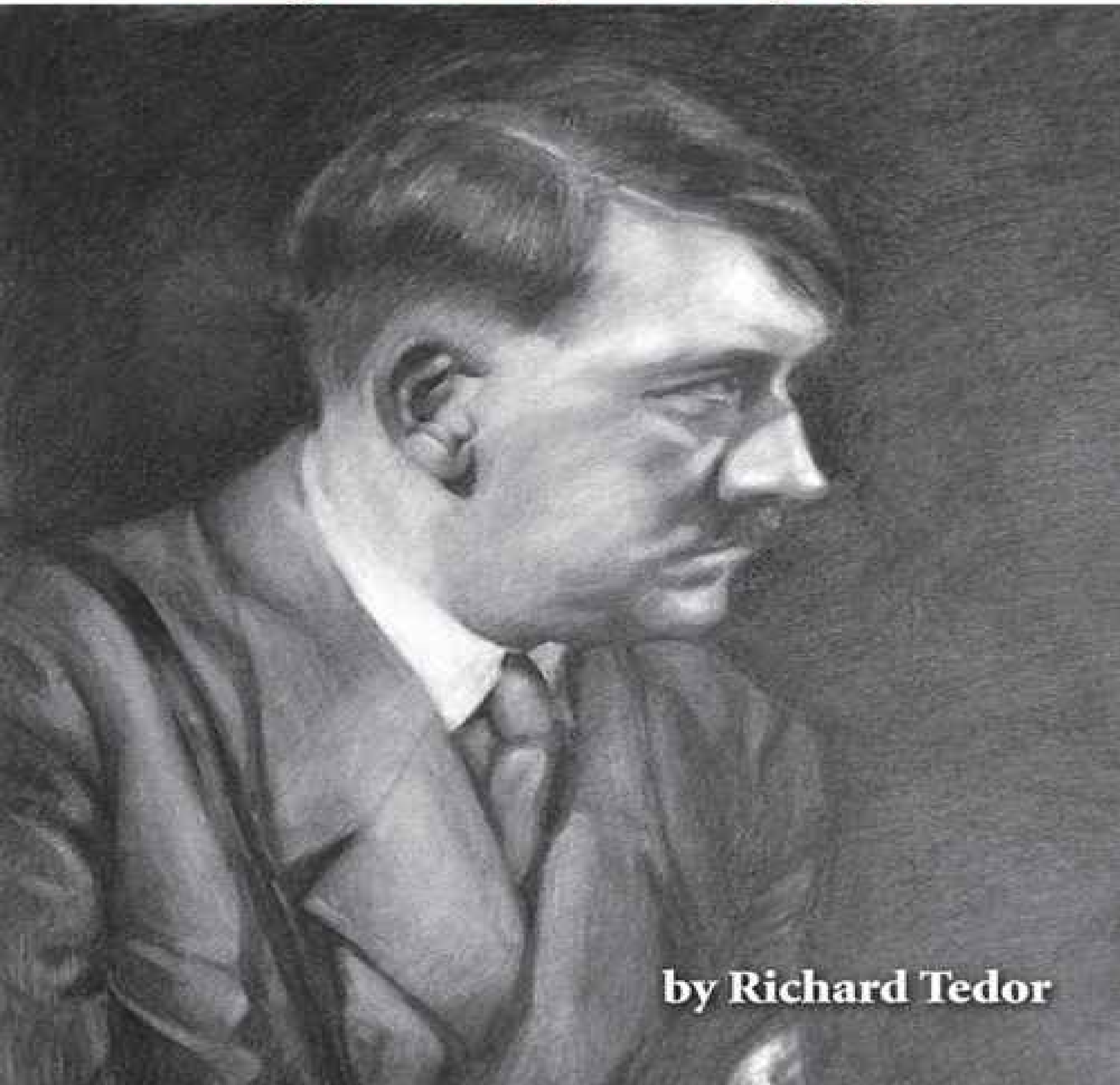
HITLER'S REVOLUTION

Ideololgy Social Programs Foreign Affairs



by Richard Tedor

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Ideology   *Social Programs*   *Foreign Affairs*

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Ideology

Introduction

Certain historical eras are timeless in their facility to inspire curiosity and imagination. Ancient Egypt and Rome recall grandeur and power while the Renaissance stands as a marvelous expression of human creativity. Napoleonic France demonstrates that one man's purpose can define an age, and the American Wild West personifies the ruggedness and adventurous spirit of the pioneer generations that conquered a continent. There is much to be learned from milestones of civilization, though people interpret events differently, conforming to their particular beliefs and interests.

A comparative newcomer to the chronology of significant epochs is National Socialist Germany. Richly intriguing and not without arousing a sense of awe, she exerted tremendous influence in her time. The antithesis of democratic values in a century witnessing the triumph of democracy, Germany went down fighting. The task of recording the history of the period is therefore largely in the hands of the country's former enemies. One of the flaws in their annals is the superficial assumption that National Socialism was a rootless political program and the product of one man's world view. There was in fact a conscious endeavor by the National Socialists to align policies with German and European customs and practices. They believed their goals corresponded to the natural progression of their continent and found the diametrical Western-democratic concept to be foreign and immoral.

A political creed advocating freedom of choice, democracy ascended not through popular appeal, but through overwhelming economic and military force. This in no sense diminishes its claim to moral leadership in the realm of statecraft. Against somewhat novel democratic beliefs in multiculturalism, majority rule, feminism, universal equality and globalization once stood social and political conventions of Europe that

had matured over centuries of conflict and compromise, of contemplation and discovery. The conviction that a nation possesses its own ethos, a collective personality based on related ethnic heritage and not just on language or environment, has no merit in democratic thinking; nor does the belief in a natural ranking within mankind determined by performance.

During the first half of the 20th Century, two world wars ultimately imposed democratic governments on European states that had been pursuing a separate way of life. One of the most successful weapons in the arsenal of democracy was atrocity propaganda. It demonized the enemy, motivating Allied armies and promoting their cause abroad. It justified the most ruthless means to destroy him. It defined the struggle as one of good versus evil, simplifying understanding for the populations of the United States and the British Commonwealth. The atrocities that Allied propagandists attribute to Germany, the backbone of resistance against Western democracy, remain lavishly publicized to this day. Conducted more zealously by the entertainment industry than by historians, this is largely an emotional presentation. The lurid appeal negates for the future a logical, impartial evaluation of political alternatives. This is unfortunate, since comparison is one of life's best tools for learning.



These Norwegian recruits taking an oath of loyalty to Hitler were among the Europeans who fought alongside the German army.

It is a common trait of human nature to often judge the validity of an argument less by what is said than by who is saying it. Casting doubt on the personal integrity of an opponent can be more influential than rational discussion to refute his doctrines. In Adolf Hitler, Germany had a wartime leader whose concept of an authoritarian, socialist state represented a serious challenge to democratic opinion. Indignant that anyone could harbor such views in so enlightened an age, and especially that he could promote them so effectively, contemporary historians provide a myriad of theories for his dissent. Thus we read that Hitler's obsession with black magic and astrology impelled him to start the war, he was mentally deranged due to inbreeding in the family, he was embarrassed by his Jewish ancestry, he was homosexual, he had a dysfunctional childhood, he became frustrated by failing as an artist, he was born with underdeveloped testicles and so forth.

It would be more useful for the authors of such legends to question for example why, after the victorious Allies established democratic governments throughout Europe in 1919, this state form became practically extinct there in 20 years. Russia, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Austria, Germany, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, and soon thereafter France adopted authoritarian regimes. Several of these countries closed ranks with Germany. Hitler gave viable, popular political form to a growing anti-liberal tendency on the continent. Volunteers from over 30 nations enlisted to fight in the German armed forces during World War II. Only by the sword did the Western democracies and their Soviet ally bring them to heel. Surely the motives of such men merit investigation. Simply dismissing the leader who harnessed and directed these dynamic human resources as a demented megalomaniac is no explanation.

During the 1990's, Russian historians gained temporary access to previously classified Soviet war archives. In recent decades, the British government has gradually released long-sealed, relevant papers to the Public Record Office. Their perusal provides a more balanced insight into the causes of the war and the aims of world leaders involved. This study draws on the published research of primarily German historians, minimizing sources in print in English. This is to provide readers in America and in the United Kingdom with material otherwise unavailable to them.

Liberally quoting from German periodicals circulated during the Hitler era will acquaint the student of history with essential elements of National Socialist ideology just as it was presented to the German public. No one can accurately judge the actions of a people during a particular epoch without grasping the spirit of the times in which they lived. The goal of this book is to contribute to this understanding.

The Rise of Liberalism

National Socialism was not a spontaneous phenomenon that derailed Germany's evolution and led the country astray. It was a movement anchored deeply in the traditions and heritage of the German people and their fundamental requirements for life. Adolf Hitler gave tangible political expression to ideas nurtured by many of his countrymen that they considered complimentary to their national character. Though his "opposition" party's popular support was mainly a reaction to universal economic distress, Hitler's coming to power was nonetheless a logical consequence of German development.

True to the nationalist trend of his age, Hitler promoted Germany's self-sufficiency and independence. His party advocated the sovereignty of nations. This helped place the German realm, or Reich, on a collision course with a diametrical philosophy of life, a world ideology established in Europe and North America for well over a century: liberalism. During Hitler's time, it already exercised considerable influence on Western civilization. It was an ambitious ideal, inspiring followers with an international sense of mission to spread "liberty, equality, and brotherhood" to mankind. National Socialism rejected liberal democracy as repugnant to German morality and to natural order.

Liberalism had been crucial for humanity's transition into the modern age. During medieval times, feudalism had prevailed in Europe. Local lords parceled land to farmers and artisans in exchange for foodstuffs, labor and military service. This fragmented political system, void of central government, gradually succumbed to the authority of kings. Supported by narrow strata of noblesse and clergy, the royals became "absolute monarchs", supposedly ruling by divine right. Common people found little opportunity for advancement. Only those choosing a career

with the church received an education. Kingdoms provided the basis for modern central governments but contributed little else to progress.

The Revival of Learning, with its interest in surviving literature from the Ancient World, led men to contemplate alternatives to the socially and politically stagnant royal regimen. The Renaissance was Europe's intellectual and cultural rebellion against "absolute monarchy" and its spiritual ally, the clergy. Defying religious superstition and intolerance, the great minds of the age exalted reason above all. Awareness of the common man's latent mental aptitude animated respect for the individual. Liberalism emerged as his liberator from the bondage of absolutism. It defined the state's primary role as guarantor of one's freedom and right to realize full potential in life.

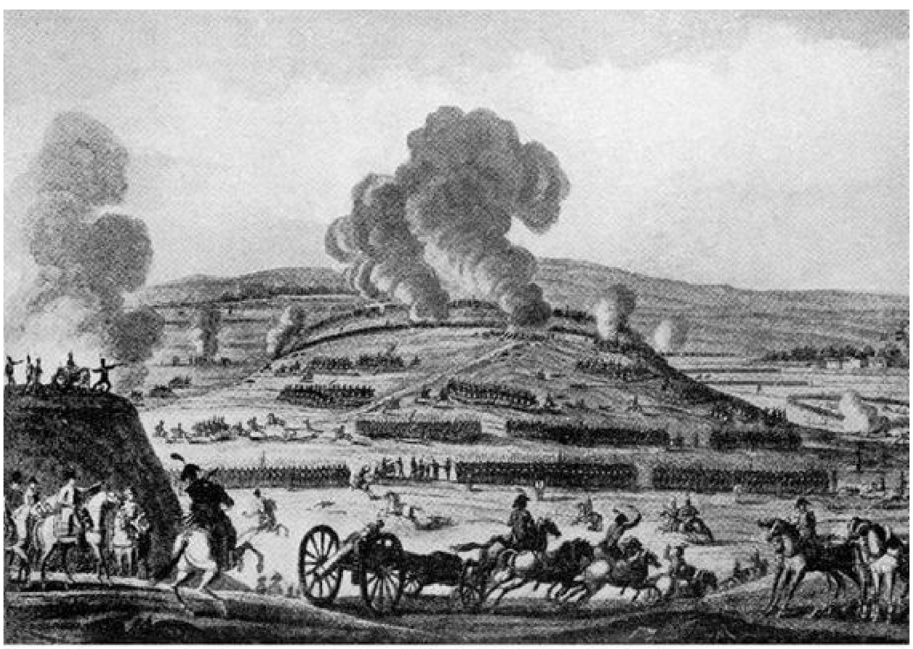
This concept acquired political form during the 18th Century. Discoveries by British and European inventors provided a suitable compliment to the new emphasis on intellect. The American Revolution of 1776 – 1783, waged against the English Crown, founded the first modern state based on liberal principles. It represented a near reversal in the roles of government and governed: The United States Constitution included a Bill of Rights that placed significant limitations on the authority of the elected representatives rather than on the population. In theory the people themselves ruled. The French Revolution introduced democracy to Europe and opened a promising field of opportunity for the common man. The Declaration of Human Rights guaranteed the French citizen freedom of thought and expression, private ownership and security. The new Republic released the French peasant from bondage and dismantled royal restrictions on commerce.

Republican France fought a series of wars against European monarchies. The French army, comprising all strata of society, mirrored the revolutionary spirit that dethroned absolutism. The Republic's minister of war, Nicolas Carnot, held military commanders to standards of conduct toward their subordinates. When the elder General Philippe de Custine once threatened deserters with the firing squad, Carnot rebuked him, explaining that "free citizens of France obey orders not out of fear, but because of confidence in their brothers" in command.[1]

In a 1940 essay, the German historian Bernhard Schwertfeger analyzed

the French army: “In the absolutist state structure of the 18th Century, the population customarily regarded grand politics with indifference. The revolution in France drew the people into its vortex. . . . One of the chief principles of the French Revolution was that in case of war everyone had to defend the fatherland. The entire resources of the nation were therefore available in an instant. While wars were previously just private affairs of the princes, now they evolved into a question of survival for the entire nation."[2]

Napoleon Bonaparte became emperor of France in 1804, but retained liberal principles adopted by the army. He arranged for soldiers demonstrating leadership qualities to be promoted regardless of birth or status. Since two thirds of France’s imperial officers had left service from the time of the revolution, positions of command became open to men displaying ability. Napoleon granted field officers greater latitude in judgment calls during combat.



Napoleon crushed the Prussian army at Jena in 1806. Prussia’s professional officer corps demonstrated neither talent nor courage during the fighting. This provoked disrespect of the aristocracy among the population.

In October 1806, the French citizens' army routed Germany’s elite, the Prussian and Saxon armies, at Jena and Auerstadt. The Prussian infantry was disciplined and obedient with a defined command structure, while

Napoleon made tactical decisions as the fighting developed and relied on the initiative of subordinates to outmaneuver the enemy as opportunities arose. At Auerstadt, the German frontline troops resisted bravely for hours, while 18,000 reserves stood idly by because there were no orders from the commander-in-chief, the Duke of Brunswick, to advance. None of their officers displayed independent judgment and led the men forward.

Witnessing the German defeat was the infantry Captain Neidhard von Gneisenau. His recommendations for reforming the Prussian army, summarized the following July, maintained that not superior strategy, but a new philosophy of life was the genesis of the enemy's success: "The revolution has awakened all the power of the nation and given each an appropriate field of endeavor. In this way heroes came to lead the army, statesmen the loftiest administrative posts, and finally at the head of a great people the greatest man among them. What limitless power lies undeveloped and unused within the womb of a nation! . . . Why do the nobles not choose this source to increase their power a thousand-fold, and open the portal of triumph for the ordinary citizen, the portal through which now only the nobility may pass? The new age needs more than ancient names, titles, and parchment. It needs fresh deeds and vitality!"[3]



Johann Scharnhorst and Neidhard von Gneisenau, Prussian generals responsible for creation of the German people's army which liberated its country from Napoleon in 1813.

Gneisenau defined how to overcome France's control of Europe: "Should the other states want to restore the balance, they must open the same resources and utilize them. They must embrace the consequences of the revolution as their own."[4] At the Treaty of Tilsit, Bonaparte had allowed

the Prussian king to maintain just 42,000 men under arms. This drastically reduced the number of active officers; of 143 generals only eight remained in service. Gneisenau and General Gerhard Johann von Scharnhorst restructured the armed service free from the interference of a professional military hierarchy. Local militias became the nucleus of a national army. The broad participation of the public unavoidably began shifting political power from the monarchy to the people. As the king reviewed the first militia battalions, he remarked, “There below marches the revolution."[5]

At this time, German patriots such as Freiherr von Stein, Ernst Moritz Arndt and Gottfried Fichte promoted civil reform, partially adopting liberal values. A populist revolutionary movement led to the Prussian-German uprising against Napoleon and drove the French out. Unlike France in 1789, the Germans, not consolidated under a central government, did not revolt against the royal house. The German patriots advocated unity among their countrymen. The goal was to reform and not overthrow the existing order. Thus, after a limited revolution in 1848, Germany evolved into a constitutional monarchy.

German reforms were, of course, a necessity. A foreign invader had conquered and partially occupied the country. Napoleon had ruthlessly drained Prussia of resources; three out of four children born in Berlin under French rule died of malnourishment. The failure of the aristocracy to defend the land revealed the need for a revised state form, and German thinkers recognized the role that the population must now play as a decisive military and political factor. They acknowledged the potential of the individual. Maintaining faith in state authority, however, the Germans did not envision government purely as the people’s servant. Liberalism nonetheless became popular in Germany during the 19th Century. It eclipsed the influence of the German intellectual movement, which groped for a balance between freedom and authority. This latent force became a cornerstone of Hitler’s ideology in the time to come.

Democracy

As Europe lost confidence in the feudal-monarchial system that had ruled for centuries, liberalism offered a political alternative. Its great

legacy was making people conscious of their individual human rights, regardless of birth, and their right to representation in government. To many, the democratic concept became synonymous with liberty itself. Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933 through constitutional means, yet campaigned to eradicate democracy. The National Socialists interpreted individual freedom differently, in a way which they argued was more realistic for Germany's circumstances.

National Socialist propagandists publicly acknowledged the contribution of liberalism. Writing in *Die SA (The S.A.)*, the weekly magazine of the party's storm troops, Dr. Theo Rehm cited liberalism's decisive role in leading Germany into the modern age: "Thanks to the triumph of liberal thinking, the middle class and other social strata experienced a major spiritual and economic impetus. Many valuable elements that would otherwise have lain fallow and undiscovered were unleashed to the benefit of all and put into action. It should also not be forgotten that after the wars of liberation (against Napoleon), the best representatives of German liberalism stood at the vanguard of the struggle for Germany's unity against the interests of the egocentric princely dynasties."[6]

Rehm nevertheless condemned the basic premise of liberalism: "The absolute freedom of liberalism will ultimately jeopardize the benefits of community life for people in a state. Attempting to place the individual ahead of the nation is wrong. . . . For the individual to live, the nation first must itself live; this requires that one cannot do what he wants, but must align himself with the common interests of the people and accordingly accept limitations and sacrifices."[7]

Hitler advocated an organic state form. Like a biological organism, the government organizes society so that every component performs an individual function for the common good. No single stratum elevates itself to the detriment of the others. The organism prospers as an entity. In this way, so does each individual person or class. Society works in harmony, healthy and strongly unified against external influences or intrusion. As defined in the periodical *Germanisches Leitheft (Germanic Guidelines)*, "Every individual element within the Reich preserves its independent character, yet nonetheless subordinates itself to its role in the community."[8] In Hitler's words from a November 1930 speech, "Proper is what serves the entire community and not the individual. . . . The whole

is paramount, is essential. Only through it does the individual receive his share in life, and when his share defies the laws of the entity, then human reason dictates that the interest of the whole must precede his interests."[9]

To organize persons into a cooperative, functional society requires that its members renounce certain personal ambitions for the welfare of others. Mutual concessions signify a willingness to work together. The common goals of society, such as defense, trade, prosperity, companionship, and securing nourishment, people achieve through compromise for the good of all. Hitler believed that a nation disregarding this will not survive. He declared in an address in April 1937, "This state came into being, and all states come into being, through overcoming interests of pure personal will and individual selfishness. Democracy steers recklessly toward placing the individual in the center of everything. In the long run, it is impossible to escape the crisis such a conflict will produce."[10]

In *Die SA*, Rehm warned that without controls, the free reign of personal ambition leads to abuse: "In as much as liberalism was once of service in promoting the value of individual initiative and qualities of leadership, its ideals of freedom and personality have degenerated into the concept of downright arbitrary conduct in personal life, but even more so in economic and commercial life."[11]

An article in the May 1937 *Der Schulungsbrief (Instructional Essays)*, a monthly ideological journal, discussed liberalism's naïve faith in "the natural goodness of the free personality." The author, Eberhard Kaütter, explained the logic of how this applies to business life in a democracy: "Liberalism assumes that one must simply leave economic arrangements to the individual active in commerce as he pursues his interests undisturbed.... The liberal social principle is based on the expectation that the liberation of the individual, in harmony with the free play of forces, will lead to independently formed and fair economic conditions and social order."[12]

The German Institute for the Science of Labor concluded in its 1940/41 yearbook that liberal economic policies bring about "the destruction of any orderly society," since persons in commerce "are released from every

political and social responsibility."[13] *Germanisches Leitheft* saw in the free play of forces an unbridled pursuit of personal wealth that contradicts the spirit of an organized society: “There is no longer a sacred moral bonding of the individual person to a community, and no bond of person to person through honor or personal trust. There is no mutual connection or relationship among them beyond purely material, self-seeking interests; that is, acquiring money."[14]

The journalist Giselher Wirsing cited the United States, the paragon of capitalist free enterprise, as an example of how liberal economic policies gradually create social imbalance with crass discrepancies between want and abundance: “Even in America herself, Americanism no longer spreads prosperity and improves the standard of living of the broad masses, but only maintains the lifestyle of the privileged upper class."[15]A German study on the depression-era United States, *Was will Roosevelt? (What Does Roosevelt Want?)*, added this: “So in the USA, one finds along with dazzling displays of wealth in extravagant, parvenu luxury, unimaginable poverty and social depravity. ... In the richest country in the world, the vaunted paradise of democracy, tens of thousands of American families endure the most meager existence. Millions of children and other citizens are underfed."[16]



Reaching a circulation in the millions, the monthly *Der Schulungsbrief* was a major medium for ideological instruction. The cover proclaims labor's "right to work, duty to perform."

Hitler's own voice on the subject from a July, 1930 speech reaffirmed his contention that a community stands or falls as one: "Our nation cannot continue to exist as a nation unless every part is healthy. I cannot imagine a future for our people, when on one side I see well-fed citizens walking around, while on the other wander emaciated laborers."[17] His interpretation of an organically regulated state, and liberal democracy's emphasis on individual liberty, naturally require different perceptions as to the role of government. The June 1937 edition of *Der Schulungsbrief* offered this analysis: "Since liberalism believes in the sanctity and limitless reasoning power of the individual, it denies the state's right to

rule and its duty to direct society. To liberalism, the state is nothing more than the personification of every unjust use of force. It therefore seeks to reduce the authority of the state in every way."[18] *Die SA* summarized that "according to liberal perception, the state has no other task than that of a night watchman, namely to protect the life and property of the individual."[19]

As for the parliamentary system of representative government, the same publication condemned it as follows: "The demand of the people to participate in government was justifiable and understandable in the new age, when politics was no longer purely an affair of the ruling dynasties. The damaging influence and weakness of the parliamentary form of government soon became apparent. . . . The participation of the people exists only on paper. In reality, career politicians get regularly elected to parliament though various parties they founded. They have made a novel occupation out of this activity. They focus not on the welfare of the people and of the state, but on their personal interests or certain financial circles standing behind them."[20]

Hitler argued that the absence of sufficient state controls in a democracy enables the wealthy class to manipulate the economy, the press and elected representatives for its own gain. A widening gulf between poverty and affluence develops, gradually dragging the working class to ruin. Addressing Berlin armaments workers in December 1940, he claimed that the public's voice in democratic systems is an illusion: "In these countries, money in fact rules. That ultimately means a group of a few hundred persons who possess enormous fortunes. As a result of the singular construction of the state, this group is more or less totally independent and free. . . . Free enterprise this group understands as the freedom not only to amass capital, but especially to use it freely; that is, free from state or national supervision.

"So one might imagine that in these countries of freedom and wealth, unheard-of public prosperity exists. ... On the contrary, in those countries class distinctions are the most crass one could think of: unimaginable poverty on one hand and equally unimaginable riches on the other. These are the lands that control the treasures of the earth, and their workers live in miserable dumps. ... In these lands of so-called democracy, the people are never the primary consideration. Paramount is the existence of

those few who pull the strings in a democracy, the several hundred major capitalists. The broad masses don't interest them in the least, except during elections."[21]

Die SA discussed another fault of parliamentary systems particularly irksome to Hitler: “There is practically no responsibility in a democracy. The anonymity of the majority of the moment decides. Government ministers are subject to it, but there is no opportunity to hold this majority responsible. As a result, the door is open to political carelessness and negligence, to corruption and fiscal mismanagement. The history of democracies mostly represents a history of scandals."[22] According to *Was will Roosevelt?*, “Corruption has spread so much that...no American citizen gets upset anymore over incidents of shameless corruption in civil service, because mismanagement is regarded as a natural phenomenon of government."[23] Hitler once recalled how a visit in his youth to the Austrian parliament revealed “the obvious lack of responsibility in a single person."[24] *Germanisches Leitheft* stated, “Absence of responsibility is the most striking indication of a lack of morality."[25]

Democracy failed because it was a product of liberalism. Focus on the individual led to “self-idolatry and renunciation of the community, the unraveling of healthy, orderly natural life,” according to the German army brochure *Wofür kämpfen wir? (What do we fight for?)*. “The inordinate value placed on material possessions from the economic standpoint formed social classes and fractured the community. Not those of good character enjoyed greater respect, but the rich. . . . Labor no longer served as a means to elevate the worth of the community, but purely one’s own interests. Commerce developed independently of the people and the state, into an entity whose only purpose was to pile up fortunes."[26] The periodical *NS Briefe (NS Essays)* summarized, “Freedom cannot be made identical to arbitrariness, lack of restraint and egoistic inconsideration."[27]

Hitler regarded liberalism’s de-emphasis on communal responsibility as an obstacle to national unity. He endorsed the words of the statesman Niccolò Machiavelli: “It is not the well-being of the individual, but the well-being of all that makes us great."[28] Hitler took the rein of government in hand in a liberal political climate. To overcome the liberal ideal, which for many was freedom personified, he introduced an

alternative state form. It created opportunities for self-development, but also instructed Germans in obedience. In so doing, Hitler eventually achieved the parity between individual liberty and state authority long contemplated by the German intellectual movement of the previous century.

The Authoritarian State

The National Socialists described their government as an authoritarian state. This was roughly a compromise between the liberal concept that administrations exist to serve the public, and absolutism's doctrine granting the head of state supreme authority to make political decisions. It disallowed the majority's voice in government, but promoted the welfare of diverse social and economic groups evenly. *Die SA* offered this definition of the authoritarian state: "It rests in the hands of the leader alone. He forms and directs his cabinet which makes policy decisions. But he also bears sole accountability to the nation for his actions. The diverse interests of individual strata of society he brings into harmony and balances in conformity with the general interests of the people. This is accomplished through the endeavors of representatives who work within their group's respective occupations, but possess no political authority. In this way, conflicts of interest and class struggle are eliminated, as is unilateral control by any commercial or political special interest group."[29]

In 1936, Hitler stressed that "a regime must be independent of such special interests. It must keep focused on the interests of everyone before the interests of one."[30] With respect to commerce, he announced that he intended "to crush the illusion that the economy in a state can conduct an unbridled, uncontrollable, and unsupervised life of its own."[31] As Führer, or leader of the nation, he reserved the right to take whatever action he considered appropriate. During a wartime speech he told military personnel, "When I recognize a concept as correct, I not only have the duty to convey this to my fellow citizens, but moreover the duty to eliminate contrary interpretations."[32]

Under National Socialism, the head of state wielded supreme power. This was with the understanding that there would be no favoritism directing public affairs, and that "along with the loftiest unlimited

authority, the leader bears the final, heaviest responsibility," as stated in *NS Briefe*.[33] Rehm offered this explanation in *Die SA*: "This system differs from dictatorship in that the appointed leader accepts responsibility before the people and is sustained by the confidence of the nation. . . . His actions insure that the leadership of the state is in harmony with the overall interests of the nation and its views. The essence of this system is overcoming party differences, formation of a genuine national community, and the unsurpassed greatness of the leadership as prerequisites. The leader of the authoritarian state personifies the principle of Friedrich the Great: I am the first servant of the state."[34]

Dr. Joseph Goebbels, in charge of propaganda in Hitler's cabinet, contrasted democracy with the authoritarian state in a speech to foreign journalists in Geneva in September 1933: "The people and the government in Germany are one. The will of the people is the will of the government and vice versa. The modern state form in Germany is a refined type of democracy, governed by authoritarian principles through the power of the people's mandate. There is no possibility that through parliamentary fluctuations, the will of the people can somehow be swept aside or rendered unproductive. . . . The principle of democracy is completely misunderstood if one concludes from it that nations want to govern themselves. They can't do it nor do they want to. Their only wish is that the regime governs well."[35]



Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels signs autographs in Nuremburg.

The authoritarian state form required that only persons exhibiting natural leadership ability assume positions of responsibility. Hitler spoke of the importance of finding such individuals during a speech in Berlin in February 1933: “We want to re-establish the value of personality as an eternal priority; that is, the creative genius of the individual. In this way, we want to sever ties with any appearance of a listless democracy. We want to replace it with the timeless awareness that everything great can only spring from the force of the individual personality, and that everything destined to last must again be entrusted to the abilities of the individual personality."[36]

National Socialism adopted liberalism's practice of creating opportunities for advancement for persons in the community. It disputed however, the population's right and ability to select leaders. Democracy allows the voters to choose their representatives. As a safeguard against tyrants, the parliamentary system favors moderation. It supposedly frowns on assertive persons accustomed to independent initiative. Hitler argued that this practice "thwarts the freedom of action and creative possibilities of the personality and shackles any talent for leadership."[37] He later wrote that the "true leader will distance himself from political activity that does not consist for the most part of creative achievement and industriousness." Conversely, "timid do-nothings and blabbermouths," especially those fearing decision-making and accountability, will seek office:[38] "Democracy is the mortal enemy of all talent."[39]

When Goebbels announced at the 1933 Berlin radio exhibition that Hitler's revolution has "dethroned unbridled individualism," this did not imply curtailing freedom for personal development.[40] Hitler clarified his party's position in a January 1941 address: "Our ideal is the nation. In it we behold a mental and physical community which providence created and therefore wanted, which we belong to. Through it alone we can control our existence. ... It represents a triumph over individualism, but not in the sense that individual aptitude is stifled or the initiative of the individual is paralyzed; only in the sense that common interests stand above individual freedom and all individual initiative."[41]

The National Socialist government assigned German schools to train the country's cadre of future leaders. *Der Schulungsbrief* defined it in this way: "Education receives the twofold task of molding strong personalities and committing them to community thinking. The primary objective of ideological instruction is formation of a solid, community-oriented viewpoint. Building assertive personalities demands steady competitive performance, selecting the most accomplished, and setting standards of achievement according to questions of character, will and ability. Only achievement justifies advancement."[42] Opportunities for self-development in the authoritarian state conformed to the National Socialist concept of individual freedom: "Being free is not doing what you want, but becoming what you are supposed to be."[43]

The Struggle for Labor

The Industrial Revolution paralleled Western civilization's political transition during the 18th Century. James Watt's development of the condensing steam engine in 1769 and Edmund Cartwright's inventions of the power loom and wool combing machine a few years later introduced the age of weaving mills, coal mines and factories. The need for manpower to fill manufacturing jobs attracted rural folk (many of whom had lost their livelihood to mass production) to city-based industry. In the 1840s, expanding railroads facilitated their migration to the major population centers. This created a new class of people: labor.

Concentrated in squalid, overcrowded lodgings, members of Europe's industrial work force had a comparatively low standard of living. Men, women and children toiled for excessively long work days in unhealthy and often unsafe conditions for meager wages. These circumstances, together with social isolation from the rest of the population, gradually led to the political radicalization of labor. In Germany, the president of the Prussian cabinet, Otto von Bismarck, promoted social reform to relieve the distress. He advocated legislation in 1863 to provide pensions for retired workers and to establish a protective association for Silesian weavers. The latter program Bismarck financed personally. The Prussian cabinet and parliament - liberal, clerical and conservative delegates alike -opposed reform. They considered the programs socialistic and contrary to the free play of forces.

Undaunted, Bismarck discussed labor issues in May 1863 with Ferdinand Lassalle, the founder of the Universal German Workers Union. They covered voting rights for labor, state-sponsored workers' associations and disability insurance. Lassalle eventually became frustrated with parliamentary opposition and remarked a year later, "revolution is the only remedy."[44] His death in a duel was nevertheless a setback for constructive efforts to incorporate labor into the populace as a cohesive element. Social ostracism led to resentment among workers. In 1875, the periodical of the Social Democratic Workers Party, *Volksstaat {The People's State)* declared, "Class hatred forms the basis for today's society."[45]

Certain reforms Bismarck managed to legislate fell short of his goals

and of labors' expectations. The inexorable radicalization of labor ultimately found expression in the doctrines of Karl Marx. Banned from Germany in 1848, Marx formulated his political-economic program in England. He based his conclusions, published in *Das Kapital*, mainly on the findings of government commissions surveying labor conditions in English factories. His ideas found a receptive audience among working Germans. Whereas early socialist reformers like Wilhelm Weitling had fought for labor's acceptance into the German national community, Marx propagated class warfare. The exploited labor stratum, Marx preached, owed no allegiance to its nationality, but should seek solidarity with oppressed workers, the so-called proletariat, of other countries.

A fresh wave of nationalism swept Germany when World War I broke out in August 1914. Members of the middle class, common laborers and tradesmen fought side by side in the German army during the prolonged struggle. The comradeship at the front partially overcame class barriers and diminished individualist attitudes. Within Germany, the endless nature of the conflict, food shortages, and the government's neglect of domestic morale led to war fatigue. When the Bolsheviks, a Marxist revolutionary movement, overthrew the Russian government and concluded a peace treaty with Germany and her allies in March 1918, this encouraged German Marxists. They organized public demonstrations by labor as well as strikes and finally a naval mutiny. This helped topple the emperor. A democratic government assumed power, and Germany concluded an armistice with her Western adversary, the Entente, in November 1918.

Supported by the Bolsheviks in Russia, German Marxists established Soviet republics within the Reich. The military commander of the Communist Party of Germany, Hans Kippenberger, stated, "Armed insurrection is the most decisive, severe, and highest form of class struggle which the proletariat must resort to... to overthrow the rule of the bourgeois."[46] The month-old Spartacus League staged a Communist uprising in Berlin in January 1919. German military formations suppressed it, causing considerable loss of life. The army quickly crushed Soviet republics proclaimed in Brunswick and Baden. The Communist seizure of Munich in April led to another armed clash, resulting in 927 deaths. The German army and patriotic militia known as the *Freikorps* (Volunteer Corps) put down additional Soviet revolts throughout Germany over the

next three years.



German *Freikorps* volunteer militia combat Communist insurgents of the Spartacus League in Berlin in 1919.

Despite the unifying influence of the World War, class distinctions resurfaced during the 1920s. The largely impoverished middle class maintained social aloofness from the industrial work force. Labor was consequently still susceptible to Communist propaganda about exploitation by capitalism. The Red Front attracted millions of followers during the politically tumultuous years of Germany's Weimar Republic. The Communists sought power through elections after 1923.

To win labor for his cause, Hitler endeavored to make the destructive nature of Marxism apparent to German working men and women. National Socialism described it as a perverse by-product of the Industrial Revolution. It owed its success to the neglect of the working class by the imperial government in the 19th Century, liberalism's creation of social barriers within Germany's national community, and labor's abrupt loss of roots. The former farmer or artisan, accustomed to creative, useful work with his hands and bound to the soil, was suddenly displaced and operating unfamiliar factory machinery in drab urban environs. A handbook published for German armaments workers summarized labor's alienation as follows: "The person hatefully regards the machine he feels

chained to. It is not his friend and helper. It only drives him in a pointless race for the avaricious interests of individual capitalist employers. It represents unemployment and starvation for many of his fellow workers. The machine distances the person more and more from nature."[47]

According to the 1938 book *Der Bolschewismus (Bolshevism)*, “such social conditions facing the German worker were the product of liberalism. Like the Renaissance, it glorified the freedom of action and development of the individual, which means the same thing as unscrupulously advancing one’s personal interests."[48] In his 1935 work *Odal*, Dr. Johannes von Leers added, “Liberalism’s preaching about the unconditional rights of the economically more powerful is so blinding, that de facto economic slavery is considered progress."[49] Leers described the impressions of a typical German farm hand entering the industrial work force, in order to demonstrate the susceptibility to Marxist preaching: “Everywhere he encounters a merciless system of capitalist commerce. His only value is as the seller of himself as a 'labor commodity.'... From poorly compensated work to unemployment and then back to work again for low wages, despised by the educated class, watched suspiciously by the police, it’s no wonder he becomes indignant."[50]

Der Bolschewismus related a further source of resentment as labors' standard of living compared with that of people in affluent neighborhoods: “The man of the stock exchange and factory owners build villas in exceptional, well laid-out sections of the growing cities. The contrast to their own wretched quarters in overcrowded lodging houses, near the smoking chimneys of the factories, becomes ever more apparent to the masses of workers."[51] In *Odal*, Leers wrote that only because German society turned a blind eye to the distress of the working people were the Communists able to recruit them: “The country’s propertied and educated strata, in contrast to the English upper class which was far more responsible about this, blocked any genuine, concrete social reform. It was their selfish belief in the laws of free trade, their heartlessness and callousness."[52]

Society’s failure to nurture and accept the working class as equal divided Germany, contributing to Marxist-organized strikes and mutinies that sabotaged the war effort in 1918. This circumstance supported

Hitler's contention that various groups within a nation, while maintaining their individual character and function, must work together as a mutually supportive entity for common goals, impartially regulated by the state. To disregard one group was to jeopardize all. Entering politics in 1920, Hitler had to combat the substantial Marxist trend among the workers. At this time, many social and economic strata in Germany formed parties championing their individual interests. This was especially dangerous in labor's case, since it allied itself with Communism, an international revolutionary movement employing subversion, terror and armed insurrection to advance its objectives.

Hitler's ponderously-named National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP) departed from political convention of the period by standing for *all* Germans. Though he privately disparaged intellectuals, the aristocracy and even the middle class, Hitler recruited from every walk of life. Above the interests of group or individual, he set those of Germany. This was the common denominator that welded his diverse membership into a formidable and aggressive political bloc. He stated in 1928 that National Socialism "is not a movement of a particular class or occupation, but in the truest sense a German people's party. It will comprise every stratum of the nation, thereby incorporating all vocational groups. It wants to approach every German who wishes only to serve his people, live with his people, and belongs to them by blood."[53]

Germany's Marxist parties, the Social Democrats and the Communists, did not campaign for labor's acceptance into the German community but to overthrow the existing social order and supplant it with an international "dictatorship of the proletariat." They did not solicit followers from among the educated classes. The NSDAP program described the Marxists as "united by feelings of hatred and envy, not by any constructive purpose, against the other half of the nation."[54] Karl Ganzer wrote in *Der Schulungsbrief*, "Marx did not come from the labor movement but from the liberal sphere. ... He incorporated the concept of a perpetual struggle within society.... Earlier German labor leaders had wanted to solve the social problem through assimilation. With his class warfare ideas, Marx wanted to settle it by bringing chaos to the community."[55]



Communist activists gather in Berlin to celebrate Red Front Fighters Day in 1926.

Ganzer wrote that Marx hoped to drive the working people “into a current that carries them further from the society they once wanted to be a part of."[56] He also pointed out an important distinction between National Socialist and Marxist perceptions of labor. The NSDAP honored it. Hitler publicly stated that “No German should be ashamed of this name, but should be proud to be called a worker."[57] Ganzer described the denigration of labor as “the worst crime of Marxist teachings. This class awareness Marx did not base on a sense of value but on a psychosis of worthlessness. Marx gave the sons of free farmers and tradesmen the derogatory name 'proletariat.' Just 40 years earlier, this expression had meant asocial riffraff. In this way, he draped the soul of an entire stratum in gloom."[58]

Hitler focused on recruiting working people, considering the nobility and the middle class profit-motivated, class conscious and lacking political usefulness. Members of the industrial work force still possessed the dynamic qualities he needed to take the movement to the streets: vitality, toughness, and willingness to fight. Publicly concentrating just on labor, however, would have contradicted the NSDAP program to represent all Germans. The party promoted the slogan, “workers of the mind and fist,” the last word referring to handworkers, not brawlers. In this sense, all working people, regardless of occupation, contribute to society. Hitler

viewed “the concept of worker a greater honor than the concept of citizen."[59]

Speaking in Nuremburg in 1938, Hitler discussed the labor issue facing the NSDAP during its struggle for power prior to 1933: “Most of our followers consisted of sons of the broad masses; workers and farmers, small artisans and office workers. . . . Many of our middle class citizens already harboring reservations about the name, 'German *labor* party,' were utterly dismayed when they first saw the rough-hewn types forming the movement’s guard. . . . For the National Socialist party, 'worker' was from day one an honorary title for all those who, through honest labor, whether in the mental or purely manual sense, are active in the community. Because the party was a people’s party, it unavoidably had more manual than white collar workers in its ranks, just as there are in the population. . . . The Marxists hated the new movement as a competitor. They figured the easiest way to finish it off would be to tell the general public that the National Socialist concept of 'labor' as a conglomerate of all working people, contradicts the concept of the proletariat. This is of course true, since the proletarian parties excluded German white collar workers from their ranks as much as possible."[60]

The NSDAP’s stand as a people’s party during the early years did not alienate the middle class, which in fact formed the mainstay of its following. Labor usually provided 30 to 40 percent of the party’s members and voters.[61] By supporting Hitler’s movement, men and women of the industrial work force found the acceptance in society - in this case the party’s microcosm of Germany’s national community - long denied them during the imperial era.

Socialism

There is considerable difference in the socialism of Hitler and that of Marxist doctrine. *Die SA* explained that the objective of a socialist state is “not the greatest possible good fortune of the individual or a particular party, but the welfare of the whole community."[62] Marx’s purely economic socialism “stands against private property... and private ownership."[63] Marx saw socialism as international, unifying the world’s working class people who were social pariahs in their own country. He therefore

considered nationalism, advocating the interests and independence of one's own nation, incompatible with socialist ideals. *Die SA* argued that since socialism really stands for collective welfare, "Marxist socialism divides the people and in this way buries any prerequisite for achieving genuine socialist goals."[64]

Hitler saw nationalism as a patriotic motive to place the good of one's country before personal ambition. Socialism was a political, social and economic system that demanded the same subordination of self-interest for the benefit of the community. As Hitler said in 1927, "Socialism and nationalism are the great fighters for one's own kind, are the hardest fighters in the struggle for survival on this earth. Therefore they are no longer battle cries against one another."[65] *Die SA* summarized, "Marxism makes the distinction of haves and have-nots. It demands the destruction of the former in order to bring all property into possession of the public. National Socialism places the concept of the national community in the foreground. . . . The collective welfare of a people is not achieved through superficially equal distribution of all possessions, but by accepting the principle that before the interests of the individual stand those of the nation."[66]

It should be noted that in the Soviet Union, the flagship Marxist state, the regime dealt with the non-proletariat far more harshly than what downtrodden labor suffered during the Industrial Revolution in Western countries. The Soviet police official Martyn Latsis for example, defined the criteria for trials of dissidents: "Don't seek proof of whether or not he rose against the Soviet with weapon or word. You must first ask him what class he belongs to, what extraction he is, what education and what occupation he has. These questions should decide the fate of the accused."[67] The Russian historian Dimitri Volkogonov wrote that Soviet purges targeted "the most energetic, most capable, frugal and imaginative" elements in society.[68] Systematic mass starvation, imprisonment, deportation, and execution in the Marxist utopia so decimated the Russian population that the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, forbade the 1937 census from being published.[69]*Der Schulungsbrief* stated in a 1942 issue, "The senseless extermination of all intelligence and talent, replacing every impulse of personality with passive herd mentality, has wiped out any natural creative aptitude" in Russia.[70]

Hitler regarded Marxist economic policy as no less repugnant to genuine socialism as the concept of class warfare was. Marx advocated de-privatizing all production and property. State control would supposedly insure equitable distribution of manufactured goods and foodstuffs, and protect the population from capitalist exploitation. Hitler advocated private ownership and free enterprise. He believed that competition and opportunities for personal development encourage individual initiative. He said in 1934, "on one hand, the free play of forces must be guaranteed as broad a field of endeavor as possible. On the other, it should be stressed that this free play of forces must remain for the person within the framework of communal goals, which we refer to as the people and the national community. Only in this way can we attain ... the highest level of human achievement and human productivity."[71]

Der Schulungsbrief dismissed Marx's disparate clamor for equitable shares in national assets and equal pay for all work as stifling to personal motivation: "The man capable of greater achievement had no interest in realizing his full potential, when he saw that the lazy man sitting next to him received just as much as he himself. . . . Any initiative to do more and willingness to accept responsibility could only die out under this system."[72]

Well before taking power, Hitler combated a tendency toward Marxist socialism in his own movement. In November 1925, district party leaders in Hannover proposed dividing large farms and distributing the land among farmhands. The state would require everyone employed in the agrarian economy to join a cooperative. Independent sale of foodstuffs would be illegal. "Critical industries" such as power companies, banks and armaments manufacturers were to yield 51 percent of the shares as "property of the nation," in other words become state controlled. The program also recommended that the government acquire 49 percent of other large business enterprises. In May 1930, Hitler met with a Berlin subordinate, Otto Strasser, who supported a similar program. Hitler told him his ideas were "pure Marxism" and would wreck the entire economy.[73] He bounced Strasser out of the party that July, underscoring his intolerance of Marxist socialism. Hitler considered the opportunity to acquire wealth and property an incentive for "eternal, enterprising personal initiative." Enabling talented individuals to realize their full

potential in life also elevated the society they belong to and serve.

Nationalism

A definitive characteristic of National Socialism was its rejection of foreign beliefs, customs and ideas within the German community. It holds that a nation consists of its blood and soil: an ethnically homogenous people and the land they cultivate, the domain that provides shelter, refuge and nourishment from the soil where their ancestors lie buried. Through self-development will a people realize their potential; through awareness of their intrinsic identity will generations fulfill the role nature and providence intended. The NSDAP held that every nation exhibits a collective personality. The influence of foreign peoples whose life experience, environment and ancestry formed them differently will debauch the nation and is hence immoral. Leers saw the introduction of liberalism and Marxism to Germany during the 19th Century as “threatening to destroy our own values.... The history of the German people is a centuries-long struggle against spiritual foreign penetration into the realms of politics, law, tradition and our way of life, a struggle against the destruction of our race and perversion of our souls."[74]

The trend toward German independence of custom and spirit became more tangible in the 18th Century. It contributed to the wave of nationalism prevalent in the new German Reich founded in 1871. Rediscovered in the 15th Century, publication of the long-lost *Germania* (completed in 98 A.D. by the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus) had already provided Germans with details of their ancestors. Tacitus had written, “The peoples of Germania have never contaminated themselves by intermarriage with foreigners but remain of pure blood, distinct and unlike any other nation."[75] He praised Rome’s ancient adversary for the men’s prowess and courage in battle, the women’s virtue, and strong family values: “Good morality is more effective in Germania than good laws are elsewhere."[76]

The writings of Tacitus, together with those of other Roman historians, provide accounts of the empire’s unsuccessful bid to conquer Germania. The details are worth summarizing here, because of their contribution to the surge of German nationalism in the 19th Century and their

significance for National Socialist ideology.

Slowly advancing into German territory, the Romans established commerce, built towns and concluded tribal alliances. Many indigenous inhabitants traded with them or joined their army as auxiliaries. Rome also garrisoned troops, enacted laws and levied taxes. Aware of its military superiority, the Roman Empire was not prone to compromise. Decades earlier in neighboring Gaul, the Celtic princes had offered armed resistance to Roman rule. The Roman general Julius Caesar mercilessly crushed Gaul, killing or enslaving a third of the population.[77]

Arminius (also known as Hermann), the son of a chieftain in the Cheruskan clan, led several large Germanic tribes in 9 A.D. to fight the Romans. A loosely unified nation of some three million farmers faced a seasoned, well-equipped army supported by the resources of an empire encompassing 60 million inhabitants.[78] Arminius appealed to the various tribes to rise against the foreign laws, taxes, garrisons and settlements gradually spreading across their land. Assailing the summer encampment of the Roman governor Quintilius Varus, presumably at the site of the modern German city of Horn, the Cheruskans and their allies annihilated three Roman legions.[79] A Roman general, Drusus Germanicus, launched punitive expeditions in 15 A.D. and again the following year. He told his army of over 80,000 men, “This war will not be over until the entire German nation is exterminated."[80] The legions vengefully massacred numerous village populations en route, but were unable to capture Arminius. Early in each of the two campaign seasons, Germanicus withdrew his forces completely after a pitched battle with the Germans, a circumstance discreetly understated by Tacitus.[81]

The Roman emperor Tiberius called off the invasion in 16 A.D. “Heavy losses in combat during 15 and 16 A.D. broke the Roman will to invade and conquer. Stopped in their tracks, the Romans from then on assumed the defensive."[82] This spared Germany the Latin influence that helped shape the civilizations of Italy, Spain, France, Britain, the Balkans, and the Near East. To 19th Century nationalists, Arminius was the “first German.” He saw beyond the local rivalries that made his people vulnerable to foreign domination. He unified the German tribes in a war of liberation that preserved his country’s independence for centuries. His life became

symbolic of national solidarity and resistance to foreign values. In the opinion of the National Socialists, a Roman conquest of Germania would have corrupted the German people for all time.[83]

Johannes von Leers cited the “morally destructive influence ... the habitual lying, swindles, calculated cruelty, treachery, duplicity, and inward insincerity of the sick, mixed race that wanted to rule the Germanic peoples."[84] Arminius rescued Germany from the fate of Gaul, as *Germanisches Leitheft* maintained: “Thanks to the deeds of the Cheruskan prince Hermann . . . the heartland of Germania was preserved from being sucked into the racially chaotic vortex of the crumbling Roman Empire."[85]

Well before the 20th Century, the story of Arminius had inspired Germans with a sense of national unity and independence. It remained popular under Hitler’s rule, though not accorded as much attention as the wars of liberation against Napoleon. These two events became pillars of National Socialism’s stand against foreign influence, be it military aggression or of an ideological nature. France’s liberalism, by virtue of its international character, was still a menace. “What makes the French Revolution significant for Germany,” wrote Ganzer in *Der Schulungsbrief*, “is the fact that it advanced as a movement with a mission. It claimed the right to make demands for all humanity. ... It presented the 'citizen of the world' concept as binding for all nations and every race.” Ganzer added that French liberalism “no longer acknowledges as valid the realities of natural origins, ethnic harmony and racial differences."[86]



Germanic tribes led by Arminius annihilated three Roman legions commanded by Varus in 9 A.D.

Certain arrangements of an international character were acceptable from the National Socialist viewpoint. Commerce, sports competitions like the Olympics, and humanitarian institutions such as Christian charities or the Red Cross foster good will among civilized nations. Internationalism was another matter, *Die SA* explained, if "connected with specific political objectives which ultimately sever the inner bond of a person to his people, in favor of a belief in universal humanity and commitment to so-called universal humanitarian goals to the detriment of service to one's own nation. . . . The objective of political internationalism is not the establishment of peaceful relations among nations, but undermining national vitality and the inner cohesion of a people."[87]

The NSDAP capitalized on the strong nationalist current that took shape during the previous century and was common among the Great Powers at that time. The party appealed to pride in German heritage and pointed out the benefits of the country's unmolested, natural historic development. These ideas were chauvinistic but politically expedient as well; Marxism was a genuine threat to German freedom. Promoting nationalism was an effective counterweight to this destructive foreign influence.

Racial Hygiene

A fundamental principle of liberalism and Marxism is the belief in universal equality of mankind. It challenged the bastion of absolutism, which had held that a superior privileged class was ordained to rule. It established a moral and legal foundation for individual freedom and parliament. The dictum of America's Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal," underscored a political demand for representative government. The French Revolution interpreted universal equality in a biological sense as well. It maintained that "all who bear the human countenance" possess comparable natural ability regardless of physical dissimilitude, gender or historic performance.

Scientists and historians disputed this view long before Hitler's time. The 19th Century English naturalist, Charles Darwin, theorized natural selection and evolution based on the study of animals and fossils. He concluded that species develop unequally, and that nature strives for improvement by favoring reproduction of those exhibiting superior traits and eliminating the unfit. Francis Galton researched the human personality, deducing that intellectual prowess and morality are inherited from parents. He advocated marriages among talented people, believing superior offspring important to advance civilization.

The French aristocrats Arthur de Gobineau and Georges Vacher questioned universal equality from a historical perspective. Gobineau identified a correlation between the growth and vitality of cultures and the races that founded them. Both men argued that ancient civilizations like Persia and India gradually crumbled as the original white populations intermarried with captive or neighboring non-white tribes. Published in 1899, Houston Steward Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the 19th Century* attributes all great cultures to the creativity of Germanic peoples. German language editions of Gobineau's and Chamberlain's writing appeared in Germany at the turn of the century.

Newly formed institutions there challenged the liberal doctrine of equality on scientific and historical grounds. Similar movements came to life in Scandinavia and in Italy, where Paolo Mantegazza and Giuseppe Sergi founded academies for anthropology and race studies. Eugenics, Galton's term for the biological investigation of inheritable traits in human lineage, became racial hygiene in Germany. European universities excluded these studies from the curriculum. Racial hygiene nonetheless

acquired some legitimacy early in 20th Century. Grounded in the theories of Darwin and Galton, its proponents offered cogent arguments, based on research and analysis, to establish it as a valid science.

In a 1925 study, Professor Hans Günther acknowledged that 19th Century education helped lower class individuals advance vocationally and socially. However, the more successful among them had fewer children and “this drained away more vitality than it fostered."[88] According to Günther, this contradicted the main priority for a healthy society: “The progress of humanity ... is only possible through augmenting the higher-quality genetic traits, which means having a greater number of children among the superior and stopping propagation of the unfit."[89]

The study of race received public funding in Nationalist Socialist Germany. The NSDAP founded the Racial Policy Office in November 1933. Its director, Dr. Walter Gross, published articles on the subject in the monthly *Der Schulungsbrief*. This journal was an important medium for ideological propaganda, with a circulation of several million. In April 1934, Gross pointed out, “scientific literature in a democracy . . . understands a nation purely as a community unified by language and culture, disregarding blood ties."[90] His interpretation of the rise and fall of nations reveals how closely National Socialist doctrine conformed to the principles of Gobineau, Chamberlain and Günther: “The old civilized states owe their existence to the Aryan man of Nordic blood who created them along with their cultures. When he encountered natives in a foreign land, he did not intermix but subjugated them. He placed those of his own kind over them as a ruling caste.

“Everything the ancient peoples produced of value and accomplished came from this stratum of Nordic conqueror. Their greatness lasted only so long as the Nordic blood that created it was strong and influential enough. As soon as the pure strain and sense of awareness of differences among races became lost, as soon as the foreign blood intermingled, so began the decay of the civilizations and states. . . . The influx of foreign blood undermines traditions, religion, good character and morality."[91]

The Racial Policy Office cited three biological factors which cause cultures to perish. The first was a decline in birthrate. This “weakens the national strength in the face of a somewhat stronger growing neighbor. It

shifts the proportionate power of the two peoples so that the numerically weaker, despite potential inner superiority, will eventually be overwhelmed." [92] A 1937 article in *Der Schulungsbrief* observed, "today, the birthrate among practically all nations of the white race is declining perilously swiftly."[93]

The second factor was a decrease in births among society's more talented elements, versus a parallel increase in children from families exhibiting "mediocre or below average ability, character, or physical and mental endowment."[94] One author blamed the policy in many democracies of "maintaining the weak and ignoring development of the strong" on the liberal perception that everything human is "unconditionally worth preserving."[95] *Der Schulungsbrief* pointed out how regarding education in democratic states, the liberal administrator "groups the mentally deficient into small classes in special schools staffed by exceptionally proficient teachers. He then jams 50 to 60 talented and healthy youngsters together into classrooms that are too small due to budgetary constraints, and instructs them only in the basics."[96]

Largely influenced by mankind's more benevolent religions, sympathy for the weak or helpless has become a natural human emotion. Gross countered this with scientific arguments: "Decisive for the historic fate of a people is whether over the centuries, bloodlines of the loftiest and most gifted elements increase in number and in so doing elevate the nation, or ... in their place those bloodlines augment that are genetically inferior and unfit. . . . The result will be that the outstanding talent will gradually disappear, while the less worthwhile will become dominant. Sooner or later that means the inevitable downfall of the civilization."[97]

The third factor leading to the fall of cultures addressed intermarriage with foreign races. This causes a drop in the birthrate among the people who founded the civilization and a corresponding rise in that of society's less creative elements from cross-breeding: "The resulting group of intermixed types and bastards lacks what alone brings enduring vitality to the comparatively pure-blooded ethnic community: the harmony of body and soul, of spirit and character in every person."[98] Dr. Theodor Artz listed the "ABC's" of National Socialist policy: "Bringing forth sufficient numbers of offspring, stifling procreation of the inferior, and preventing the

assimilation of racially foreign elements."[99]

What constitutes “racially foreign elements” was a matter of controversy within the NSDAP. Various ethnic groups comprise European civilization: Nordic, Gallic, Basque, Slavic, Baltic, Mediterranean and so forth. Pioneer racial hygienists maintained that intermarriage among diverse white clans produces a superior being. In 1924, the analyst Hildebrandt published an essay explaining, “The highest standard of living evolved where the Nordic race represented the leadership, but intermixed with others who adopted its culture.” Hans Günther wrote, “The French anatomist and race researcher de Quatresages observed in 1857 that the greatest mental and physical activity rests not among those of pure race, but among racially cross-bred populations."[100]

Günther argued that just as competition can motivate people, the merger of different bloodlines creates a conflict within the psyche of the individual or population itself, animating a hitherto latent zest for struggle: “Stress, confrontation, and the urge to prevail produce the greatest achievements of mind and spirit. There is more potential for tension and altercation in the racially intermixed person than is the case for a pure-blooded one....The pure-blooded man harbors too little restlessness. Germans, Englishmen, or non-Scandinavians in general are struck by the 'all too placid demeanor' of many purely Nordic Scandinavians."[101]

Under Gross, the Racial Policy Office walked a thin line between the more relaxed criteria envisioned by Günther and many of his contemporaries, and the “blond rapture” they cautioned against. In 1934, Gross' colleague, Wolfgang Abel, published generalizations of Germany’s ethnic tribes: the Nordic, Pfalzish, Eastern Baltic, Dinaric, Alpine, Western Nordic, and Western Mediterranean. He described physical characteristics, illustrated with camera portraits resembling mug shots, and collective personality traits of each. Abel offered for example, this profile of the Nordic type: “The least spontaneous, he surpasses all other races in steadfastness of purpose and cautious foresight. Thinking ahead, he subordinates his driving impulses to long-range goals. Self-composure is perhaps the most distinguishable trait of the Nordic race. In this lies a significant part of the ability to create civilizations. Races lacking this quality are incapable of following through and implementing long-term

realizable objectives."[102]



Wolfgang Abel's *Schulungsbrief* essay defining the ethnic and racial composition of the people of Germany included these images of children born of unions between French Moroccan soldiers who had garrisoned the Ruhr from 1923-1925 and German women.

Pfalz Germans were "more steadfast than pliant, more grounded than adaptable, more level-headed than daring, more freedom-loving than power seeking." The Western Mediterranean German "takes life less seriously. Empty formula courtesies and insincere gestures play a major role, such as promising gifts and extending invitations he doesn't really expect people to accept. His inclination toward truthfulness and ethics is weaker than the Nordic person's."[103]

Hitler disapproved of such comparisons. He especially opposed reference to physical contrasts of stature, coloring, or physiognomy among German ethnic groups. In 1930 he told an aid, "Discussions about the race problem will only divide the German people further, incite them against one another, atomize them, and in this way make them inconsequential with respect to foreign affairs." He admonished senior officials of the party to avoid the subject of ethnic diversity in speeches and articles: "Everything that unifies and welds the classes together must be brought forth, what divides them, what re-animates old prejudices, must be avoided. . . .They are the surest way to destroy a community." He remarked that people

should be selected for leadership roles “not according to outward appearance, but by demonstrating inward ability."[104] Goebbels, himself a diminutive man with a slight limp, recorded in his diary in October 1937, “Discussed race policy with Dr. Gross. I reproached him for our flawed standards for making selections. According to them, practically every officer today would be dismissed."[105]



Women of Friesenland, a province in northwestern Germany which is home to many Nordic Germans. This photo accompanied a *Schulungsbrief* article identifying various ethnic clans.

Like the earlier race hygienist Günther, Hitler believed that the more capable and fit among the Germans should not set themselves above other groups to preserve or advance their particular bloodline. It was their duty to help elevate the German nation as an entity. As summarized by his chronicler Dr. Henry Picker, Hitler was “firmly resolved to transfer racially excellent military units, such as formations of the Waffen SS, to every region where the indigenous people are substandard. They will provide for the population by replenishing its bloodlines."[106] (The Waffen SS was an elite branch of the German military requiring high physical standards for enrollment.)

Though believing in the inequality of mankind, Hitler opposed clique-

forming or elitist attitudes among his countrymen's more gifted persons or ethnic groups. He measured people not by what nature gave them, but by how they contributed their talents, be they lofty or modest, to advance the national community. This was a standard every German could aspire to, regardless of his or her station in society. Personal attitude and endeavor, not the circumstances of birth, determine the superior being.

In a speech as chancellor of Germany, Hitler described the evolution of his country into a social, national, and spiritual entity: "The German people came into being no differently than almost every truly creative civilized nation we know of in the world. A numerically small, talented race, capable of organizing and creating civilization, established itself over other peoples in the course of many centuries. It in part absorbed them, in part adapted to them. All members of our people have of course contributed their special talents to this union. It was, however, *created by* a nation-and-state forming elite alone. This race imposed its language, naturally not without borrowing from those it subjugated. And all shared a common fate for so long, that the life of the people directing the affairs of state became inseparably bound to the life of the gradually assimilating other members. All the while, conqueror and conquered had long become a community. This is our German people of today. . . . Our only wish is that all members contribute their best to the prosperity of our national life. As long as every element gives what it has to give, this element in so doing will help benefit all our lives."[107]

Racism versus Marxism

The NSDAP also perceived racial hygiene as a political controversy. *Der Schulungsbrief* pointed out that National Socialism "is the first ideology in history to consciously incorporate the laws of nature and apply their wisdom and efficiency to mankind."[108] *Germanisches Leitheft* contended that emphasis on race is the "antithesis of the western perception, especially former France. It was there that the grand revolution proclaimed the equality of all who bear the human countenance. . . . Intermixing of human types was a main thrust of French democracy." The revolution of 1789, the periodical noted, was a poor example for such an altruistic ideal: "The revolution became a power struggle among ambitious party leaders. This no longer led toward a new order, but

climaxed in the elimination of those public representatives still conscious of their responsibility to the people. . . . The so-called reign of terror began. It depopulated entire towns and districts. 'Death to the blondes' was the battle cry."[109]

The National Socialists viewed Marxism as the political descendant of revolutionary France. It leveled humanity off to a "faceless mass" by destroying society's more talented, productive elements.[110] According to *Der Schulungsbrief*, "Marxism is a radicalized variant of liberalism strongly rooted in the brutality of the French Revolution."[111] The journal *Volk und Reich {Nation and Realm)* wrote, "The Bolshevik revolution regards itself as the legitimate successor to the French."[112]

Brutality was indeed an element common to both France's Reign of Terror and Bolshevik Russia. The first Soviet dictator, Nicolai Lenin, became the only member of the original Politburo, the governing council, to die a natural death. Stalin proclaimed a "war on terror" in December 1934, personally writing a new law imposing a death sentence for "acts of terrorism" and leading to massive executions for several years. In 1937, the Soviet state carried out 353,074 death sentences, the following year 328,618.[113] Houston Steward Chamberlain described Russia's Bolshevik regime as under "the influence of the French revolutionary ideal, which in the course of a century, turned decent people into half-beasts filled with envy and loathing."[114]

Goebbels described the rise of the NSDAP as "one continuous confrontation with the problem of Marxism."[115] The ideologies were at loggerheads regarding questions of the significance of race. The German study *Der bolschewistische Weltbetrug {The Bolshevik World Swindle)* provides this comparison: "The National Socialist world view interprets the nation racially, as a national community grounded in common historical blood ties of its people as determined by fate. The primary conviction of Marxist ideology is the class concept defining those with possessions and those who possess nothing. This class concept is bound neither by nationality nor by race. It stands like a dividing wall between people of the same nation. At the same time, it joins as brothers persons of the most diverse racial types. 'society is dividing into two immense, diametrical, hostile camps, bourgeois and proletariat,' declared the

Communist Manifesto.... Adolf Hitler's judgment runs a different course. It desires the unity of naturally related people, the removal of class distinctions, and the personal feeling within every individual of belonging to the national community that the person, through fate, was born into."[116]

A primary liberal argument against the significance of race is environmentalism. Supported by democracy and Marxism alike, this theory holds that not racial ancestry, but factors such as climate, arable land, education, luck, and social opportunities determine group or individual achievement. As *Der Schulungsbrief* explained it, "Marxism is built on the teaching that all men are equal at birth. Differences that become apparent in the course of a lifetime are the result of external influences. Personal development therefore depends on surroundings. The more favorable the environment, the better the person will turn out."[117] The periodical *NS Briefe* countered that this view "degrades man to a slave of his circumstances. . . . The determining factor supposedly rests with the environment; that man does not mold the age, the age molds the man."[118]

Application of environmentalism's principles as a matter of state policy, according to Gross, demonstrates how impractical the theory is: "The habitual criminal, the cold-blooded murderer who since boyhood went through life harboring asocial instincts detrimental to society, was just a 'victim of his surroundings.' The ruthless eradication of those manifesting such bestial, menacing natures is not the obvious solution, but attentive, painstaking education, and improvement through transfer to a 'better environment'; the prison with radios, billiards, and a library. Here the killer experiences a more comfortable lifestyle than the hard-working laborer in the land. This is the logical consequence of the belief that exterior influences decide or can alter the nature of a person."[119]

The periodical *NS Briefe* related the German position: "No amount of education can change the inner substance of a person, since the factors that determine who he is do not come from without. They rest within him, given to him by his parents and grandparents"[120] *Germanisches Leitheft* summarized that race alone "makes the individual and indeed the whole society masters of their environment and external circumstances, to shape them according to their will."[121]

The Nation as One

The crux of National Socialist ideology and state form was German unity. Hitler promoted whatever contributed to this goal and rejected what did not. A literate man with a profound grasp of history, he fashioned a political philosophy that interpreted Germany's past as a continuous, progressive struggle for independence and unification. Disharmony among the Germans had cost them freedom and life. The Roman Empire had imposed an immoral foreign influence until the Cheruskan Arminius unified prominent German tribes to force the invaders out. During the 17th Century, a politically discordant Germany became the battleground for the 30 Years' War. More than half the population perished. The subsequent Peace of Westphalia in 1648, engineered by Sweden and France, partitioned Germany into a myriad of insignificant duchies and principalities. The treaty established a parliament at Regensburg for their common representation. "Our diplomacy set the wheels of the Reichstag in motion for the purpose of making any serious government in Germany impossible," boasted the French historian Jacques Bainville in 1915.[122]

Austria and Prussia regained diplomatic and military poise during the 18th Century. Due to a lack of connection between the royal hierarchy and the population, neither state could later repulse the invasion by Napoleonic France. Conquered in 1806, only through nationalism did the Prussians again become free. Prussia unified Germany in 1871, and this introduced prosperity and progress. Crass social discrepancies nonetheless persisted. At that time, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed the yearning among his people for a deeper, enduring bond: "There are many fine threads in the German soul, but they are not woven into a single, solid and mighty knot; a sorry spectacle and a solemn peril. This must be remedied, a greater solidarity in the nature and soul of our people created, the rupture between the internal and the external eliminated. In the loftiest sense we must strive for German unity, and strive more passionately than for mere political unification. . . . Create the concept of a nation."[123]

Hitler grew up in the social milieu that Nietzsche criticized for its class distinctions. World War I, during which Hitler saw combat in an infantry regiment, welded various social factions into an entity. "At the front, the

feeling of being destined to belong together, the feeling of a community, was by and large reborn," Gross wrote in *Der Schulungsbrief*.[124] Hitler and his comrades felt solidarity in the trenches but found it undermined by political discord at home. "The enemy no longer faced the frontline soldier just as an honorable fighting man, but also made trouble behind the front," a journal for the German armed forces related.[125] During the post-war period, the country suffered economic distress, political disharmony and foreign exploitation. Hitler later declared that when the German people "form a unified bloc, they are a power. When they are divided, they are defenseless and impotent."[126]

By emphasizing German unity, National Socialism followed in the footsteps of the Romans' nemesis Arminius, the Prussian reformers who rose against Napoleon, the statesman Bismarck, and the eminent Nietzsche. The matter of Germany's moral, social, and political harmony influenced the NSDAP's stand on virtually every major issue. National Socialism, the journal *Der SA. Führer (The SA Officer)* wrote, recognized that "the labor question was the cardinal social problem of the 19th and 20th Centuries. ... It confronted liberalism's materialistic, distorted idea of freedom, which leads to abuse and to the rule of a capitalist minority, with a new freedom; one based on the growth of the individual fellow citizen within the national community according to achievement. Unlike the disfranchisement of labor through liberalism, National Socialism incorporates the worker into German society, elevating him and his accomplishments onto par with the rest of the nation."[127]

Judging someone's worth according to performance, as far as Hitler was concerned, superseded questions of ethnic standing within the German community. Though many National Socialists based their world view on scientific research on race, the government under Hitler also relied on education to realize human potential. Goebbels wrote in his diary in June 1936, "the Führer sharply disapproves of the work of all the race committees."[128] Hitler based his attitude on the potential negative impact such activities could exercise on national unity.

National Socialism was largely a product of 18th and 19th Century values. Hitler saw how the fall of absolutism released powerful forces slumbering within mankind. But as the creative surge burst traditional

bonds and restraints associated with the old order, it gave birth to doctrines that evolved independently of one another and were without historical precedent. Liberalism, the dominant philosophy, shattered convention and institution alike, entering unchartered political waters in the unassailable conviction that individual freedom was the future of humanity. Composed at the dawn of the liberal age, the fable of the sorcerer's apprentice, who tampered with and unleashed extraordinary powers he was unable to control, proved a prophetic allegory.

The National Socialists believed that the exaltation of the individual in the liberal-democratic sense would "dissolve the healthy social order and lead to ruin."[129] They nonetheless sanctioned the free play of forces, opportunity for personal development and free enterprise. The task of their authoritarian government was to promote these practices, simultaneously insuring that the collective interests of the population remain decisive. As the individual advanced in National Socialist Germany, so did the nation. Hitler harnessed yet stimulated the forces of human creativity reanimated by the Enlightenment, giving them a form, purpose, and direction not envisioned by the pioneers of liberalism and democracy.

Chapter 2

The New Germany

Germany Prostrate

On February 10, 1933, Hitler discussed his economic program at a mass meeting in Berlin for the first time as chancellor. Telling the audience, “We have no faith in foreign help, in assistance from outside our own nation"[1], the Führer opined that Germany had no friends beyond her own borders. World War I had ended in 1918 when the German Reich and Austria-Hungary surrendered, and harsh terms imposed by the Allies, despite U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s promise of an equitable settlement, had left the Reich more or less on a solitary course.

Allied delegates opened the peace conference in Versailles, France, in January 1919. They demanded that Germany accept blame for the war and compensate the victors for damages. This enabled them to initiate reparations requirements that reduced the Germans to virtual bondage. To extort the Reich’s signature onto the treaty, Britain’s Royal Navy maintained a blockade of food imports destined for Germany. The blockade had been in force since early in the war. Over 750,000 German civilians, mainly children and the elderly, perished from malnourishment.[2]

Despite Germany’s capitulation, the British continued to block food deliveries until the summer of 1919. On March 3 of that year, the English cabinet minister Winston Churchill told the House of Commons, “We are holding all our means of coercion in full operation or in immediate readiness for use. We are enforcing the blockade with vigor. We have strong armies ready to advance at the shortest notice. Germany is very near starvation. The evidence I have received from the officers sent by the War Office all over Germany shows first of all, the great privations which the German people are suffering, and secondly, the great danger of a collapse of the entire structure of German social and national life under the pressure of hunger and malnutrition. Now is therefore the moment to

settle."[3] Allied leaders bluntly told German delegates at Versailles to accept the treaty or face a military invasion and extension of the blockade. The Germans signed on June 28, 1919.

The Allies' conditions degraded Germany to a secondary power. The victors divided 13 percent of the Reich's territory among neighboring states. The 7,325,000 Germans residing there became second-class citizens in their new countries.[4] Lost natural resources and industry included 67 percent of Germany's zinc production, 75 percent of iron ore, a third of the coal output and 7.7 percent of lead. The Allies demanded twelve percent of Germany's exports, with the option of raising the amount to 25 percent, for the next 42 years.[5]

The malnourished German nation also surrendered a million cattle including 149,000 milking cows, plus 15 percent of the harvest. The Allies confiscated a quarter of Germany's fishing fleet. In addition to large amounts of timber, 7,500 German locomotives and 200,000 freight cars went to the former enemy.[6] Germany also relinquished her prosperous African colonies to the Anglo-French overseas empires. Every transport vessel exceeding 1,600 tons, practically the Reich's entire merchant fleet, enriched the Allies' war booty.[7] Germans forfeited private investments abroad.

Morally justifying the terms, the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, described how the Allied victory accomplished Germany's "liberation from militarism."[8] He gloated on another occasion, "We have got most of the things we set out to get. The German navy has been handed over, the German merchant shipping has been handed over, and the German colonies have been given up. One of our chief trade competitors has been most seriously crippled and our allies are about to become Germany's biggest creditors. This is no small achievement!"[9] Between 1880 and 1900, Germany's share of world trade had risen from 10.7 percent to 13.8 percent. During that period, Britain's had declined from 22 to 16 percent, and France's from 13 to eight percent.[10] Woodrow Wilson remarked in September 1919, "Is there any man or woman—let me say, is there any child—who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? This was an industrial and commercial war."[11]

The war transformed Germany from a flourishing industrial power to a distressed state. Military service had cost 1,808,545 German soldiers their lives.[12] Another 4,247,143 had been wounded. The country was bankrupt from defense expenditures. Marxist agitation provoked labor walk-outs. There were 3,682 strikes in 1919, which impacted 32,825 businesses and 2,750,000 workers.[13] Decline in industrial output and reparations burdens contributed to massive unemployment. Demobilized soldiers couldn't find jobs. A new law required managers to reinstate former employees who had served on active duty during the war; however, many business owners were among the slain and their companies were gone.

Additionally, large numbers of foreign workers were in Germany, having taken over the manufacturing positions of men inducted into the army. Soldiers returning home found their pre-war jobs occupied by ersatz labor. People out of work lacked purchasing power. This decreased demand for consumer goods, leading to production cut-backs and further lay-offs. Unemployment fluctuated dramatically. The downward spiral began late in 1927. In 1931 alone, 13,736 companies filed for bankruptcy. An average of 107,000 people per month lost their livelihood. In mid-1932, almost 23 million Germans (36 percent of the population) were receiving public assistance.[14]

The London Declaration of May 5, 1921, established Germany’s aggregate debt at 132 billion reichsmarks (RM). One mark equaled approximately 50 cents. It also imposed a “retroactive payment” of twelve billion gold marks plus another billion in interest. The German government in Weimar could not meet the obligation. Without foreign commerce, Germany had little income. Fearing inordinate taxation to meet Allied demands, affluent Germans invested capital abroad. The flight of currency and the national deficit contributed to inflation. In November 1922, Weimar requested a moratorium on cash payments. The Inter-Allied Reparations Commission declared Germany in default. The French army garrisoned the Ruhr-Lippe region, source of almost 80 percent of Germany’s coal, steel and pig iron production. Demonstrating passive resistance, civil servants and laborers there boycotted the work places. This increased the number of persons on public aid and further reduced productivity. The Ruhr debacle precipitated the currency’s slide into worthlessness. Inflation wiped out the savings of Germany’s middle

class.

A commission chaired by the American Charles Dawes made recommendations to balance Germany's budget and stabilize the money system. The Allies assumed control of the Reich's Bank and sold shares in the national railroad. They fixed annual payments at $250 million. Another committee convened in Paris in February 1929 under the American banker Owen Young. The Young Plan arranged a new payment plan for Germany to extend to 1988. Since 1924, Weimar had been borrowing from Wall Street banks to meet reparations demands. The worldwide fiscal crisis of 1929 curtailed this source of capital. Despite tax increases, the German government failed to generate sufficient revenue to restore the economy. By March 1933, the German national debt amounted to 24.5 billion reichsmarks.

In mid-1931, the Allies reluctantly approved Germany's request for a one-year moratorium on reparations. In June 1932, Chancellor Franz von Papen negotiated a further three years' suspension of payments. Another benefit for Germany at this time was two consecutive mild winters. This created a favorable climate for agriculture and new construction. From January to October 1932, another 560,000 Germans found jobs. Even with this improvement, unemployment still exceeded five million.

In July 1932, Hitler described the Reich's economic woes in a speech distributed on gramophone records during an election campaign: "The German farmer destitute, the middle class ruined, the social aspirations of millions of people destroyed, a third of all occupational German men and women out of work and therefore without earnings, the Reich, municipalities and provinces in debt, revenue departments in disarray and every treasury empty."[15] These were the consequences of Allied exploitation of Germany after World War I. It deeply scarred the German people. Doctors reported alarming statistics of undernourishment among children. The divorce rate was disproportionately high. During the Weimar Republic's 13 years, thousands of Germans committed suicide, many driven by despair and frustration over months of inactivity. The German author Rudolf Binding placed the number at 224,900.[16] Throughout the period, the Germans endured violations of their sovereignty by countries whose armies had never conquered Germany but had persuaded her leaders to surrender in 1918 through the insincere promise of a

conciliatory peace. It was a disillusioned and destitute nation that Hitler inherited when he took office on January 30, 1933.

The Road to Recovery

Two days after becoming chancellor, Hitler outlined his economic program in a national radio address: “Within four years, the German farmer must be rescued from poverty. Within four years, unemployment must be finally overcome."[17] The government enacted laws based on the strategy conceived by Fritz Reinhardt, a state secretary in the Reich’s Ministry of Finance. This unassuming, pragmatic economist introduced a national program to create jobs on the premise that it is better to pay people to work than to award them jobless benefits.

The Labor Procurement Law of June 1, 1933, allotted RM 1 billion to finance construction projects nationwide. It focused on repair or remodeling of public buildings, business structures, residential housing and farms, construction of subdivisions and farming communities, regulating waterways, and building gas and electrical works. Men who had been out of work the longest or who were fathers of large families received preference in hiring. None were allowed to work more than 40 hours per week. The law stipulated that German construction materials be used.[18]

Also passed that summer, the Building Repair Law provided an additional RM 500 million for smaller individual projects. Home owners received a grant covering 20 percent of the cost of each project, including repairs and additions. Owners of commercial establishments became eligible for grants for conducting renovations, plus for installing elevators or ventilation systems. Renters could apply for grants to upgrade apartments.

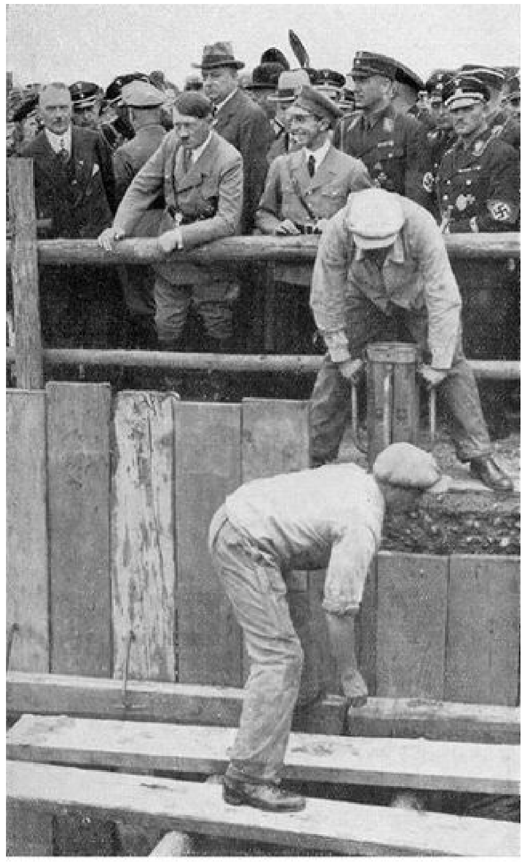
Under the law’s provisions, property owners receiving grants borrowed the balance of new construction costs from local banks or savings & loans. The government provided borrowers coupons to reimburse them for the interest on the loans. The Tax Relief Law of September 21, 1933, offered income and corporate tax credits for repairs. The regime covered nearly 40 percent of the cost for each renovation. The Company Refinancing Law, legislated the same day, converted short term loans into long term ones

with lower interest. The law reduced the previous seven percent interest rate to four (and ultimately to three) percent. This did not hamper finance companies, since it prevented defaults on loans. The refinancing law released businesses from the obligation to pay their portion of unemployment benefits to former associates. The resulting available capital enabled them to re-hire employees and expand production.[19]

The Labor Procurement Law provided newlyweds loans of RM 1,000 at one percent monthly interest. The loans came in the form of coupons to buy furniture, household appliances and clothing. To be eligible, the bride had to have been employed for at least six months during the previous two years, and had to agree to leave her job. Returning women to the home vacated positions in commerce and industry, creating openings for unemployed men. For each child born to a couple, the government reduced the loan by 25 percent and deferred payments on the balance for one year. For larger families, upon birth of the fourth child, the state forgave the loan. It financed the program by imposing surtaxes on single men and women. By June 1936, the government approved 750,000 marriage loans.[20] Reinhardt described the policy of diverting women into the household economy as “steadily regrouping our German women with regard to the labor market and with respect to social policy. This regrouping alone will ... in a few years be sufficient to eliminate unemployment, and bring about an enormous impetus in every branch of German economic life."[21]

The marriage law released approximately 20,000 women per month from the work force after September 1933. The increase in newlyweds created a corresponding need for additional housing. More tradesmen found work in new home construction. In the furniture industry, manufacture increased by 50 percent during 1933. Factories producing stoves and other kitchen appliances could not keep pace with consumer demand. The state imposed no property tax on young couples purchasing small single family homes. As Reinhardt predicted, reduced payments in jobless benefits and increased revenue through corporate, income and sales taxes largely offset the enormous cost of the program to reduce unemployment and revive the economy. He stated in Bremen on October 16, 1933, “In the first five months of the present fiscal year, expenditures and income of the Reich have balanced out."[22]

When Hitler took power, labor represented 46 percent of German working people and 82 percent of the nation’s unemployed.[23] The government initiated massive public works projects to expand the job market for labor. It especially concentrated on upgrading the national railway. Also, construction of a modern superhighway began in September 1933, which found work for an additional 100,000 men each year. The production and delivery of building materials for pavement, bridges and rest stops simultaneously employed another 100,000. The Reich’s Autobahn project, originally planned for over 3,700 miles of new highway construction, relied primarily on manual labor. Limiting the use of modern paving machinery enabled the Autobahn commission not only to keep more men on the job, but devote 79 percent of the budget to workers' salaries. The Autobahn was a toll road; however, reduced wear on vehicles using this efficient highway system and savings in travel time were worthwhile compensation to motorists for the fee.



Hitler and Goebbels promoted reconstruction through public appearances, here for example at an Autobahn building site. To the right of Goebbels is Dr. Fritz Todt, supervisor of Autobahn construction. At far fight is Sepp Dietrich, commander of Hitler's bodyguard, the *Leibstandarte*.

The Reich also focused on relieving the distressed circumstances facing the German farmer. The depression had left many farms in debt. Younger family members often left their homes to seek opportunities in the cities. A September 1933 law established the *Reichsnährstand* (Reich's Food Producers), an organization to promote the interests of people in the agrarian economy, fishermen and gardeners. With 17 million members, the *Reichsnähr stand s* principle objectives were to curtail the gradual dying-out of farms in Germany, and prevent migration of rural folk to concentrated population centers or industry. Controlling the market value of foodstuffs, the organization gradually raised the purchase price of groceries by over ten percent by 1938. This measure was not popular

among the public, but greatly assisted planters.

The *Reichsnährstand not* only arranged for a substantial reduction in property taxes for farms, but wiped the slate clean on indebtedness. This gave heavily mortgaged farm owners a fresh start. Another organization, the *Landhilfe* (Rural Assistance), recruited approximately 120,000 unemployed young people to help work farms. The government financed their salaries, training and housing. It also arranged for temporary employment on farms for school graduates and students on summer break. The *Landhilfe* permitted foreigners living in Germany, primarily Poles, to enter the program. Hitler had a particular interest in preserving Germany's farming stratum. During World War I, his country had suffered acutely from Britain's naval blockade of food imports. He considered a thriving agrarian economy vital to making Germany self-sufficient in this realm. By reducing the effectiveness of a potential nautical blockade in the event of future hostilities, growers indirectly contributed to national defense.

On the ideological plain, Hitler regarded a robust agrarian class to be essential for a healthy general population. In the turbulence of the modern age, industrialization and progress removed man further and further from his natural surroundings. Bound to the soil and the family homestead for generations, the farming community was an anchor rooted in traditional German customs and values. It drew sustenance from the land and passed it on to the nation. While labor represented a dynamic political force, the farming stratum remained the "cornerstone of ethnic life."[24] The Führer esteemed such self-reliant, rugged people as an indispensable mainstay for the nation. Addressing half a million farm folk in Bückeberg in October 1933, he stated, "In the same measure that liberalism and democratic Marxism disregard the farmer, the National Socialist revolution acknowledges him as the soundest pillar of the present, as the sole guarantee for the future."[25]

Hitler not only maintained Germany's agrarian class but augmented it; housing planners sited many new settlements of single family homes in rural areas where residents took up farming. The government provided interest-free loans and grants for the purchase of farm implements along with special marriage loans for newlyweds. The debts were to be forgiven after the family had worked the farm ten years.[26]

Germany's economic reforms would never have been so successful without overhauling the tax structure. In the Weimar Republic, state and local governments had raised revenue for operating expenses, reparations payments to the Entente, and public aid through steadily increasing taxation. The drain on working families' budgets had reduced purchasing power, restricted the demand for consumer goods, decreased production and caused lay-offs. As more people lost jobs, unemployment pay-outs were augmented, placing greater demands on those still in the work force. Municipalities collected taxes and fees according to local needs without a nationally coordinated revenue system. Costly, inefficient, and overlapping bureaucracies burdened citizen and economy alike.



Hitler arrives on June 14, 1938, to dedicate the cornerstone for the House of Foreign Travel in Berlin. This was one of the many public works projects his government introduced to boost commerce. He is accompanied by tourism director Hermann Esser and architect Albert Speer.

Tax reform was a major element of Reinhardt's recovery program. Initial measures legislated to this end demonstrate what a crippling influence the Reich's runaway taxation had previously exercised on commerce. The first to benefit from tax relief was Germany's automotive industry. The Motor Vehicle Tax Law of April 1933 abolished at one stroke all operating taxes and fees for privately purchased cars and motorcycles licensed after March 31 of that year. The reduction in consumer costs to own and operate a car was so dramatic as to significantly boost sales. While the industry produced just 43,430 passenger vehicles in 1932, the number rose to 92,160 during Hitler's first year in office. New car production increased annually. The number of people employed in automobile manufacture climbed from 34,392 in 1932 to 110,148 in less than four years. From 1933 to 1935, the industry built 15 more assembly plants.[27]

The government recovered the revenue lost from repealed automotive taxes through reduced payments of jobless benefits, income tax from newly employed auto workers, highway tolls and corporate tax. The state collected an additional RM 50 million by offering owners of older cars the opportunity to pay a one-time reduced fee to permanently eliminate their annual vehicle tax liability. The government devoted the entire amount to improving roads, thereby hiring more people for pavement and bridge repair. Others found work in industries that manufactured machinery. The tax law ratified on June 1, 1933, eliminated fees for the replacement and purchase of tools and machinery, as long as buyers opted for German-made articles. This measure breathed life back into industrial equipment production.[28]

Reinhardt demanded the creation of a simplified, centrally supervised tax structure. New tax laws and instructions used every-day German, easily understandable to taxpayers. He emphasized in his 1933 Bremen speech, "Not only will the number of taxes be substantially fewer, but the tax laws and new payment instructions will be worded so that the Reich's Finance Ministry will no longer have as much latitude as before in interpreting the tax laws. The fact that the room for interpretation of tax laws was previously so broad, was a serious blow to the protection of taxpayers' rights."[29]

Under the Reinhardt system, the government gradually supplanted the plethora of municipal, provincial and state taxes and fees with a single

national tax. The finance office calculated the budgets of local and state administrations, collected all revenue and distributed it to agencies and municipalities. During the year, each citizen received an annual income tax invoice and paid the amount in twelve monthly installments. This covered his or her total tax liability. The arrangement greatly reduced administrative costs of mailing local tax bills, collecting individual fees and pursuing delinquencies. It also simplified the accounting of private corporations no longer required to determine withholding taxes on employees' salaries.

In the long run, Germany's policy of reducing taxes to promote commerce increased public revenues. During the first half of 1939, the finance office reported over RM 8.3 billion in revenue, compared to RM 6.6 billion in fiscal year 1932/33.[30] These were evenly assessed taxes in 1939, paid by a fully employed population; not an imbalanced, excessive liability burdening working people to provide jobless benefits for the less fortunate.

In a Nuremburg speech in 1936, Reinhardt described income tax as "the main source of revenue. Income tax is measured according to (the citizen's) actual income and is therefore the most socially just form of collecting taxes."[31] A 1933 Swedish study comparing taxation among Great Powers established that the German people paid 23 percent of their income in taxes. In the United States the amount was 23.4 percent, in Norway 25.1 percent, Britain 25.2 and Italy 30.6 percent.[32] (The figure did not take into account America's numerous hidden taxes that were non-existent in Germany.)

No program to restore German prosperity could omit international trade. Deprived of its colonies, the Reich had to develop foreign markets to acquire raw materials for industry and a portion of the food supply. With gold reserves exhausted, the National Socialist administration had to create an alternative source of purchasing power. Despite objections from Hjalmar Schacht, president of the Reich's Bank, Hitler withdrew Germany's money system from the gold standard. Gold was the recognized medium of exchange for international commerce. Over centuries, it had become a commodity as well. Financiers bought and sold gold, speculated on its fluctuations in price, and loaned it abroad at high interest. Hitler substituted a direct barter system in foreign dealings. German currency

became defined as measuring units of human productivity. The British General J.F.C. Fuller observed, “Germany is already beginning to operate more on the concept of labor than on the concept of money."[33]

In January 1938, the Soviet diplomat Kristyan Rakovsky commented on the German money system. Rakovsky had held posts in London and in Paris and was acquainted with Wall Street financiers. He explained, “Hitler, this uneducated ordinary man, has out of natural intuition and even despite the opposition of the technician Schacht, created an especially dangerous economic system. An illiterate in every theory of economics driven only by necessity, he has cut out international as well as private high finance. Hitler possesses almost no gold, and so he can't endeavor to make it a basis for currency. Since the only available collateral for his money is the technical aptitude and great industriousness of the German people, technology and labor became his 'gold'.... As you know, like magic it’s eliminated all unemployment for more than six million skilled employees and laborers."[34]

Germany’s withdrawal from the gold-based, internationally linked monetary system in favor of a medium of exchange founded on domestic productivity corresponded to Hitler’s belief in maintaining the sovereignty of nations. This was an unwelcome development in London, Paris and New York, where cosmopolitan investment and banking institutions profited from loaning money to foreign countries. Germany no longer had to borrow in order to trade on the world market. Foreign demand for German goods correspondingly created more jobs within the Reich.

Upon taking office, Hitler had assigned the elimination of unemployment as his first priority. During the first twelve months of his administration, unemployment declined by nearly 2.3 million. In 1934, 2,973,544 persons were still out of work, but by November 1935, 1,750,000 more Germans had found full time jobs.[35] Addressing the National Socialist party congress in Nuremburg on September 12, 1936, Reinhardt presented statistics demonstrating that “mass unemployment in Germany has been overcome. In some occupations, there is already a shortage of workers.” He stated that among other civilized nations, of the 20 million people out of work in 1932, only two million had returned to the work force over the previous four years (The statistics did not include the USSR,

since no figures were available).[36] During the same period in Germany, the economy created jobs for over five million previously unemployed persons. In addition, the average work day within this time frame increased from six hours 23 minutes to over seven hours per shift.[37]

In November 1938, the German government officially recorded 461,244 citizens as unemployed. The statistic included individuals who were physically or mentally disabled, mostly homebound and hence unemployable.[38] It also incorporated the populations of Austria and the Sudetenland. Germany had annexed these economically depressed lands the same year. Both had suffered massive unemployment, which Hitler had not yet had time to fully alleviate.[39] From 1934 to 1937, the number of women in the work force increased from 4.5 million to 5.7 million. Despite programs to encourage women to return to traditional family roles, the government did not restrict those choosing a career. They were equally eligible for tax incentives offered for starting small businesses.[40]

An interesting element of Germany's recovery is that Hitler, against the recommendations of Germany's principle financier, Schacht, authorized the economic programs developed by Reinhardt, a man possessing comparatively little influence. A disciple of the liberal economic theory, Schacht disapproved of government interference in commerce. He opposed state-sponsored programs to combat unemployment. Otto Wagener, head of the NSDAP's economic policy branch, told Hitler that Schacht was "an exponent of world capitalism" and hostile to the state's revolutionary approach to economics.[41] Historians have nonetheless described Schacht as a "genius of improvisation" and a "financial wizard." One British author credits this American-educated, international banker with "financing ... unemployment programs by greatly expanding public works and stimulating private enterprise."[42] Schacht's pre-1933 writings and verbal statements reveal no trace of the ideas introduced by Reinhardt to revitalize the economy and create jobs. Regarding unemployment, the "solutions" Schacht suggested were to reduce workers' wages, encourage thrift, and resettle people out of work in state-operated camps.[43]

The campaign to stabilize Germany's economy witnessed measures that were only possible in an authoritarian state. The National Socialist maxim,

"community interest before self-interest," guided a policy that was efficient and uncompromising. Among the first to feel its weight were Germany's trade unions. By 1932, they had far less influence than during the previous decade. Few workers were prepared to risk their jobs by striking. Union representatives voiced no protest when Hitler, five weeks after taking power, banned the Iron Front and the *Reichsbanner*. These organizations had provided muscle at public demonstrations of the Social Democratic Party, which was closely affiliated with labor. In April 1933, the German trade unions issued a public statement declaring their desire to cooperate with the new government.[44]



Among the international organizations covertly financed by Moscow's Comintern was this group of British communists, here protesting the fascist take-over of Spain in the 1930's.

Hitler had no interest in collaborating with trade unions. On May 2, the police and deputized SA men occupied union offices throughout the Reich. National Socialist labor commissioners replaced the union leaders. The government confiscated union funds. It banned strikes and lock-outs. The new chancellor acknowledged the necessity for an organization to advocate labor's interests. He believed however, that it should be a state agency. When Hitler had been a combat infantryman in 1918, strikes called by independent trade unions stalled the delivery of munitions to the front. During a visit to Berchtesgaden between the world wars, Lloyd George had told the Führer, "Your revolution came to our aid at the last minute."[45]

Considering trade union leaders to be Marxist-oriented, Hitler viewed them as little more than instruments of Soviet Russia's Comintern. Moscow had established this organization to promote Communist movements abroad. In 1935, the Executive Committee of the Communist International redefined the Comintern's role. The "active endeavors of the Comintern" were to be brought "in the minutest detail into harmony with the objectives and tasks of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union."[46] To allow the continued existence of non-government regulated trade unions, Hitler reasoned, placed German labor under the influence of a foreign power that was a commercial rival on the world market. In Soviet export, Hitler saw "a dangerous dumping policy with slave wages to undermine the economic systems of other countries."[47]

How the USSR misused Europe's labor unions, a former Communist explained in a 1938 book. The forestry engineer Karl Albrecht had worked in Soviet Russia as a director of various projects in the timber industry from 1924 to 1934. His memoirs, penned upon return to Germany, corroborated Hitler's misgivings: "The Communist party of the Soviet Union contrived strikes on precise schedules in the forestry industries of Finland, Sweden, Canada, Poland or other competing timber export countries. This was to paralyze work in wooded regions or sawmills there, to make export impossible. The purpose of these actions was to create shortages of lumber in the wood-importing lands England, France, America, Holland and so forth. This would overcome importers' reluctance over bringing in Soviet timber and pave the way for capturing these markets. . . . Strikes and other revolutionary activities, senseless wage

demands in mining and coal production, in the lumber, paper and textile industries, ordered by the Comintern or the Red trade unions international, in no way served the interests of those employed in these branches of industry."[48]

After Hitler nullified the unions, workers came under the newly established Reich's Institute for Labor Mediation and Unemployment Insurance, the RAA. A common procedure of the RAA was to redistribute manpower where it could better serve national interests. The institute not only possessed the authority to transfer workers to critically distressed areas, but to prevent others from relocating. It required for example, that young farmers seeking "occupationally unfamiliar employment" in cities first obtain RAA permission. Applications were rarely approved. In this way, it contributed to the goal of sustaining Germany's agrarian economy and farming stratum. Another RAA regulation removed workers and supervisors in industrial centers who had come from farms, transplanting them into rural areas to resume their previous occupation. The RAA also prevented members of the workforce, regardless of vocation, from entering fields of endeavor that already had a higher rate of unemployment.

The restrictions generally impacted a small portion of the population. The institute relaxed some regulations as more Germans found jobs and the economy improved. By democratic standards, these initial steps represent an infringement on personal liberty. Directing people to specific occupations where their skills were better utilized developed out of Bismarck's perception of labor as "soldiers of work." National Socialism capitalized on this martial approach by defining vocational endeavor as an achievement for the nation or, in Hitler's words, a "willingly given offering to the community."

As a sacrifice for Germany, toil elevated "the working person to the first citizen of the nation."[49] No longer, as in the traditional sense, would material possessions determine social status, but service to the common good through labor. Imposing a "duty to work" on his people, Hitler accordingly honored their achievements in the spirit that a country pays homage to the sacrifices of its soldiers. Still, the overall goal of his comparatively strict policy was not to militarize the national psyche but first and foremost to combat unemployment. Pursuant to his maxim that controls are fair and just when enforced uniformly without exempting any

particular group, Hitler resorted to equally undemocratic methods to protect the working population from exploitation. He forbade speculation on nationally vital commodities such as agricultural harvest and energy. The stock exchange, which Reinhardt dismissed as a "gangster society," suffered increasing limitations to its freedom of operation.[50] Only rarely, and then with difficulty, could novice applicants obtain a broker's license.

The government also protected smaller and newer businesses by banning the practice by established enterprises of ruining retail competitors by underselling their products.[51] The state appointed the Price Oversight Commission to stop businesses from decreasing production or delivery of certain commodities, especially foodstuffs, for the purpose of creating artificial shortages to inflate prices and overcharge consumers. Hermann Göring, a member of Hitler's cabinet, declared, "it is a crime when an individual or group tries to place private capitalist profit above the people's welfare." Göring warned that the state would "intervene in the severest way" upon identifying offenders.[52] In some cities, the government closed businesses found to be not in compliance.

Perhaps nowhere was Hitler more restrictive than with regard to regulations governing the conduct of public officials. Sponsoring massive construction programs to improve the economy required civil servants to solicit bids and award contracts, issue building permits, conduct inspections, re-zone districts, recruit manpower and so on. The opportunity for them to favor certain private commercial interests in exchange for gratuities was particularly troublesome to Hitler. He enacted laws making it illegal for public servants to possess stock portfolios or to serve as consultants to private corporations. The law also affected members of the armed forces and the National Socialist party in positions of procurement. It was a violation for anyone leaving public sector to accept a job with a private concern that he had previously contracted with in an official capacity. Even as private citizens, former civil servants were forbidden by Hitler from investing their personal wealth in stock shares.[53]

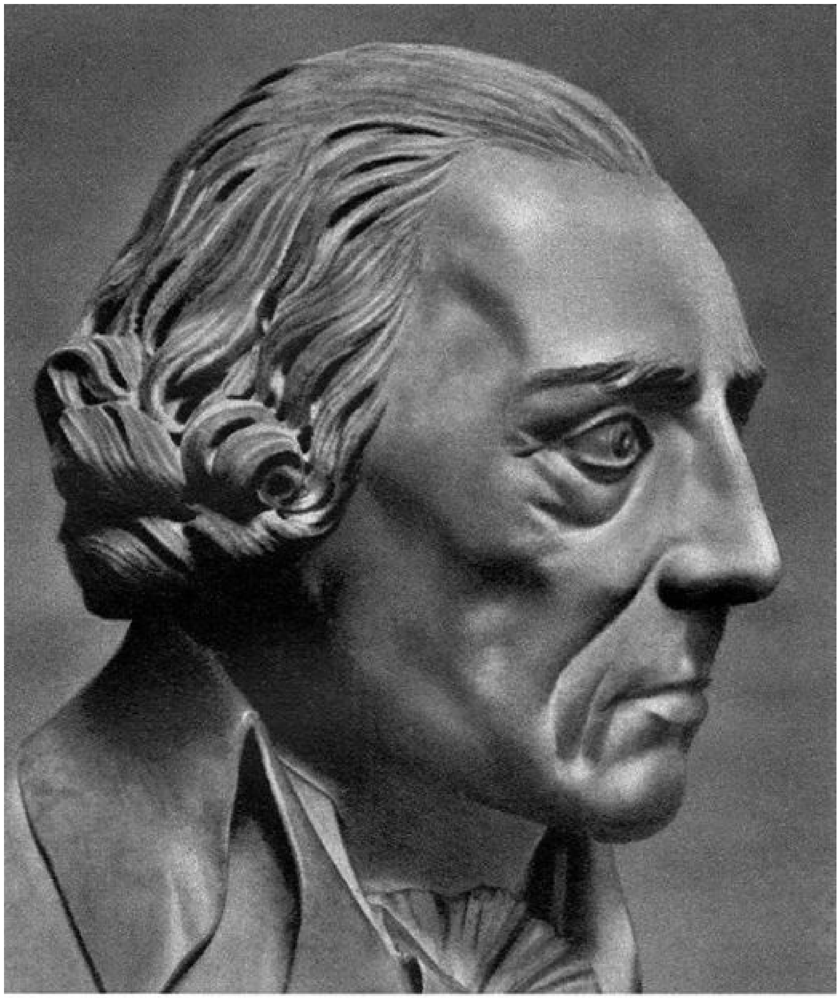
By 1937, Germany's work force was fully employed. The former American President Herbert Hoover, whose own country's unemployment rate then stood at 11.2 percent, praised the Reich's labor procurement program for both efficiency and frugality. The parallel New Deal program

in the United States was more costly and making less headway. The U.S. national debt was $37.2 billion in June 1938. This was three times that of Germany. Even America's Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, confided in his diary the Germans' success at creating jobs.[54]

The German parliament gave Hitler a free hand by ratifying the Empowering Act on March 21, 1933. This authorized him to write all laws, automatically approved by the Reichstag whether constitutional or not, for the next four years. The measure allowed the Führer to proceed aggressively against unemployment and national bankruptcy.

The Social Renaissance

Germany's triumph over unemployment, without foreign help and during worldwide economic depression, was in itself an accomplishment any government could be satisfied with. For Hitler, it was a step toward far-reaching social programs intended to elevate and unify the population. Like other elements of National Socialist rule, subsequent reforms realized ideas that long had been developing in German society. During the mid-18th Century, the Prussian monarch Friedrich the Great created an efficient state bureaucracy and revised taxation. His law providing pensions for civil servants and officers invited criticism that it would bankrupt the treasury.



Prussia's King Friedrich the Great introduced social reform, and proved a capable general during the Seven Years' War. Both servant and master of his country, he personified the leadership qualities the National Socialists sought to emulate.

The progressive thinking in the Prussian-German civil service led to the country's first labor law the following century. The regulation, ratified on April 6, 1839, banned the practice of working small children in mines. No boy could enter the work force until after at least three years of schooling. It became illegal for children to work night shifts or Sundays. More child labor laws followed in 1853. Though primitive by modern standards, the regulations were advanced for the time. The North German League's Vocational Decree of 1869 and further measures to safeguard labor after the country's unification in 1871 placed Germany in the lead among industrial nations in the realm of social reform.

The social programs Hitler introduced had two objectives. One was to improve the standard of living of the average citizen. The other was to create a classless society in which the bourgeois, labor, agrarian folk and nobility enjoyed equal status as *Volksgenossen*. This translates literally to "ethnic national comrades," though the expression "fellow Germans" better conveys its spirit. Hitler believed that removing traditional class barriers would create social mobility for talented individuals to advance. All Germany would benefit through the maturation of the more promising human resources.

An important organization for promoting National Socialist community values was the Volunteer Labor Service (FAD). Founded in August 1931, the FAD recruited the unemployed for public works. Paying volunteers two reichsmarks a day, a primary purpose of the FAD was to improve the physical and mental well-being of unemployed and unoccupied young Germans. Upon assuming power, Hitler expanded the organization and raised the pay scale. It numbered 263,000 members by mid-1933. The Führer considered it "superbly suited for conscious instruction in the concept of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community)."[55] Membership in the FAD declined as more jobs became available. In June 1935, Hitler enacted a law making six months' labor service compulsory for teenagers upon high school graduation. No longer voluntary, the FAD became the RAD: Reich's Labor Service. Members assisted in Autobahn construction, drained swamps, planted trees, upgraded poorer farms and improved waterways.



The Führer welcomes district commanders of the Reich's Labor Service to the Nuremberg NSDAP congress in September 1938.

At the NSDAP congress in September 1935, Hitler defined the RAD's *social* purpose to 54,000 assembled members: "To us National Socialists, the idea of sending all Germans through a single school of labor is among the means of making this national community a reality. In this way, Germans will get to know one another. The prejudices common among different occupations will then be so thoroughly wiped away as to never again resurface. Life unavoidably divides us into many groups and vocations.... This is the primary task of the labor service; to bring all Germans together through work and form them into a community."[56] At an earlier NSDAP congress, Hitler had described the labor service as "an

assault against a horrible pre-conceived notion, namely that manual labor is inferior."[57]

Having disbanded the trade unions in 1933, Hitler wanted an umbrella organization devoted to the welfare of both labor and management, so that "Within its ranks the worker will stand beside the employer, no longer divided by groups and associations that serve to protect a particular economic and social stratum and its interests."[58] In his own proclamation defining the organization's objectives, Hitler stated, "It is in essence to bring together members of the former trade unions, the previous office worker associations and the former managers' leagues as equal members."[59]

The structure supported the goal of eliminating strife within industry by encouraging mutual respect, based not on position but on performance. As defined in one publication, "There is neither employer nor employee, but only those entrusted with the work of the entire nation.... Everyone works for the people, regardless of whether a so-called employer or so-called employee, as it was in the previous middle class order."[60]

This represented a revolutionary departure from the liberal democratic perception, as another German study maintained: "In the capitalist system of the past, money became the goal of work for the employee as well as for the employer. It was the individual's wages that appeared to give work a sense of purpose. The employee saw the employer simply as someone who 'earns more.' And the employer regarded the staff of workers in his firm only as a means to an end, an instrument for him to earn more. The consequences of this thinking were ominous. Should the working man have any ambition to work anymore when he says to himself, 'I'm only working so that the man over in the office can earn more?' Can a business deliver quality work if everyone thinks only of himself? . . . Labor—its purpose, its honor, the creative value, the German worker as a master of his trade and a proud, capable working man, all this became secondary. Reorganizing labor does not just mean removing the crass material deficiencies of life. It must penetrate the relationship of person to person."[61]

In May 1933, the first congress of the German Labor Front took place in Berlin. Known by the acronym DAF, it replaced the disbanded unions and

managers' associations. Hitler stated, “The goal of the German Labor Front is the creation of genuine cooperative fellowship and efficiency among all Germans. It must see to it that every single person can find a place in the economic life of the nation according to his mental and physical capabilities that will insure his highest level of achievement. In this way, the greatest benefit to the overall community will be realized."[62]

The DAF therefore contributed to Hitler’s goal of welding the Germans into a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Here, he stated, “the head and the hand are one. The eternal petty differences will of course still exist. But there must be a common foundation, the national interests of all, that grows beyond the ridiculous, trivial personal squabbles, occupational rivalries, economic conflicts and so forth."[63] The Führer’s blueprint for eliminating class division was largely an equalization process. Through useful work, everyone could earn the respect of the community. “No one has the right to elevate himself socially above another because some outward circumstance makes him appear better,” Hitler argued. “The loftiest individual is not the one who has the most, but the one who does the most for everyone else.... The honest man, even if he is poor, is worth more than a wealthy one possessing fewer virtues."[64]

One revolutionary measure, appalling to laissez faire disciples like the banker Schacht, was the government’s regulation of salaries and managerial privileges. It first addressed the custom in private sector of paying white collar workers monthly stipends even when absent from the job, while according no similar benefit to factory personnel. The government abolished this discrepancy. It arranged instead “to insure the laborer a certain measure of compensation when missing work due to important family matters, plus a fixed, company-financed subsidy in case of illness."[65]

The Law for Regulation of Wages introduced guidelines for calculating salaries. Based on the principle of comparable pay for equal demands on an individual’s time and energy, its goal was to guarantee a decent standard of living for everyone who worked hard. The law stated, “Grading of salaries must correspond to the actual demands of the work involved. It therefore doesn't matter what job the individual has. Personal

engagement is the decisive factor."[66] The regulation further called for an adjustment in salary for employees with unavoidable financial hardships, in order to guarantee their standard of living. Even time lost from work due to weather conditions became a factor. It also required that every citizen receive pay for overtime.

The wage law did not level off personal income regardless of occupation. Grading took such factors into consideration as physical or mental demands of a job, the precision or independent initiative required, education, hazards and experience. Its purpose was to establish a system that could be applied to the most diverse careers and activities and help reduce social and economic differences. It acknowledged the value of honest labor and the need to adequately compensate all who perform it. A guiding principle of the wage grading program was not to reduce the standard of living of previously higher paid associates, but to elevate that of those who earned less.

This arrangement sliced into the profits of industry. By 1938, the costs to employers for workers' salaries had risen by another 6.5 percent.[67] They included paid holidays for labor, a measure Hitler personally introduced. The wage law established a minimum monthly income per person, sufficient to guarantee a decent living standard. It affected 96 percent of all salaries nationwide. The Führer himself wrote that bringing a particular class of people into the community "does not succeed by dragging down the upper classes, but by elevating the lower. This process can never be carried out by the higher class, but by the lower one fighting for its equal rights."[68]

His concern for the welfare of poorer working people sometimes led to Hitler's personal involvement in correcting lesser social ills. During a dinner monolog, he once complained of the contrast in comfort and luxury between first, second and third class passenger accommodations on steamship lines: "It's unbelievable that no one worried about how conspicuous the differences in living conditions of this sort were." Apparently during a tour of an ocean liner, Hitler took umbrage at the comparatively wretched crew's quarters. He ordered them upgraded on all passenger ships. The controversy he later described in a discussion about social problems with Abel Bonnard, a member of *the Academie Francaise*, in May 1937: "When we demanded that crew members should have better

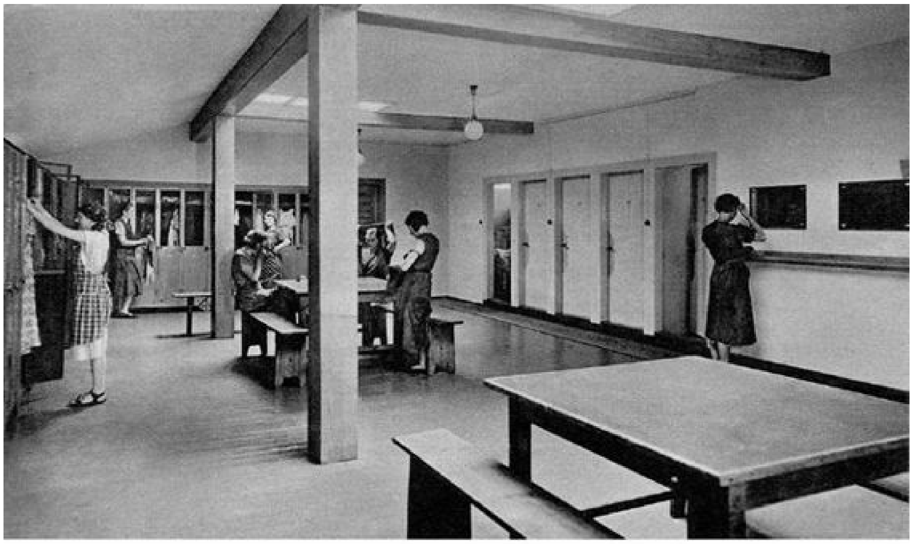
quarters, we received the answer that space on large steamers is too precious to fulfill our wishes. When we required that crew members should have a deck specially reserved for them to get fresh air, we were told that this involves technical difficulties the engineers haven't solved yet."[69]

As can be imagined, these objections had no influence on Hitler's resolve. He further related to his French guest, "Today crews on the ships have decent cabins. They have their own deck where they can relax on good deck chairs, they have radios for diversion. They have a dining room where they take their meals with a deck officer. All these improvements really weren't so costly. They just had to want to do it."

Funneling officers into the same mess hall as the sailors corresponded to Hitler's commitment to demolish class barriers throughout society. The German navy custom of providing four menus per ship, the quality of meals varying according to rank, he also abolished. Observing once at dinner that "during the World War, the field kitchen was incomparably better when officers had to be fed from it to," Hitler arranged that henceforth, the German armed forces nourish all ranks with the same rations. "The view that it will weaken authority if distinctions are not maintained is groundless," he contended. "Whoever can do more and knows more than another will have the authority he needs. For one who is not superior in ability and knowledge, his rank in whatever office he tenants won't help."[70]

Corrections in salary, benefits and accommodations not only raised the standard of living for labor, but helped integrate it socially. Advantages previously associated with middle class prestige became universal. This diminished one more status symbol dividing the complacent, privileged caste from those seeking acceptance. Hitler had no faith in the good will of the bourgeois and in fact blamed it for Germany's class barriers. He passed laws making exploitation of labor a punishable offense: "This must be considered necessary as long as there are employers who not only have no sense of social responsibility, but possess not even the most primitive feeling for human rights."[71] In January 1934, the government enacted the Law for Regulation of National Labor, containing 73 paragraphs. At a press conference, Reich's Labor Minister Franz Seldte defined the foundation of the law as removal of "unsavory" class distinctions which had previously

contributed to the collapse of the German economy, in favor now of "emphasizing the concept of social esteem," and the leadership idea in business life.[72]



Under supervision of the National Socialist government, plant managers provided spacious, hygienic and congenial facilities for labor, such as this factory locker room.

The law's vocabulary replaced the terms "employer and employee" with "leader and follower." It designated respective roles in this way: "The leader of the facility makes decisions for the followers in all matters of production in so far as they fall under the law's regulation. He is responsible for the welfare of the followers. They are to be dutiful to him, in accordance with the mutual trust expected in a cooperative working environment."[73] The law imposed moral obligations on both. The German economist Dr. Hans Leistritz described them in these words: "Both the facility leader and the followers are under the commission of the people. Each always faces the same choice, of whether he should fulfill his duty or become caught up in self-serving goals. Both the facility leader and the followers can face disciplinary action that punishes transgressions against this social code of honor." The law cited examples, such as "if a contractor, leader of the facility or other supervisory personnel misuse their authority in the workplace to unethically exploit the labors of members of the following or insult their esteem." The law likewise held workers accountable for "jeopardizing the harmony of the workplace by intentionally stirring up their co-workers."[74]

Though according management autonomy in decision-making, the law included serious restrictions as well. Business owners and directors were responsible not only for sound fiscal management of the company, but for the protection of employees from abuse. This was not presented as benign advice from the government. It was a law word for word. Income and profit were no longer the primary objectives of an enterprise. The well-being of its associates became a concurrent purpose. The Reich's Ministry of Labor published a table of offenses under the category of unjust exploitation of employees. These included paying salaries below fixed wage scales or failure to compensate workers for overtime, refusing to grant employees vacations, cutting back hours, providing insufficient meals, inadequate heating of work stations, and maintaining an unhygienic or hazardous work environment. Supervisors were even disciplined for browbeating their staff to work harder.[75]

Provisions of the labor law extended to rural regions as well, according similar protection for farm hands. In 1938, the periodical *Soziale Praxis (Social Custom)* reported on "serious punishments" meted out to landowners who quartered their hands in inadequate accommodations. Owners were also cited "for not taking advantage of possibilities for financing the construction of housing for farm workers offered by the agent of the Four Year (reconstruction) Plan."[76]

The record of court proceedings for 1939 demonstrates that the labor law primarily safeguarded the well-being of employees rather than their overseers. During that year, the courts conducted 14 hearings against workers and 153 against plant managers, assistant managers and supervisors. In seven cases, the directors lost their jobs. For more serious violations, the labor ministry enlisted Germany's Secret State Police, the Gestapo. This generally resulted in the arrest and confinement of "asocial" managers and usually involved cases where consciously allowing hazardous or unsanitary working conditions impaired an employee's health.[77]

One of the most proactive advocates for the working class was the leader of the DAF, Dr. Robert Ley. A combat airman during World War I and former chemist, Ley had joined the NSDAP in 1925. His words lent emphasis to the regulations governing treatment of labor: "Today the owner can no longer tell us, 'my factory is my private affair.' That was

before, that's over now. The people inside of it depend on his factory for their contentment, and these people belong to us.... This is no longer a private affair, this is a public matter. And he must think and act accordingly and answer for it."[78]

Despite the involvement of law enforcement, the DAF's long-term goal was to *voluntarily* correct attitudes that led to social injustices. Hitler opined that "the police should not be on people's backs everywhere. Otherwise, life for people in the homeland will become just like living in prison. The job of the police is to spot asocial elements and ruthlessly stamp them out."[79] A 1937 issue of *Soziale Praxis* maintained, "The state does not want to run businesses itself. It only wants to arrange that they operate with a sense of social awareness." The DAF acknowledged that any labor law will "remain ineffective as long as it fails to persuade the leaders and followers working in the factories of the correctness and necessity of such a perception of labor, and train them in a corresponding viewpoint.[80]

In October 1934, Hitler published a decree defining the nature and the tasks of the DAF. He wrote, "The German Labor Front is to insure harmony in the work place by creating an understanding among facility leaders for the justifiable requirements of their followers, and balancing this with an appreciation among the followers for the circumstances of and for what is feasible for their factory." In this sense, Hitler assigned the DAF an educational mission as well. It was but a single element of an extensive, lengthy process of "total inward re-education of people as a prerequisite" to achieve "genuine socialism."[81] At the party congress in 1935, Hitler pledged to "continue educating the German people to become a true community."[82]

The Führer was personally skeptical regarding the possibility of winning his own generation for the NSDAP's social program. He expressed concerns to his aid Wagener in September 1930: "Do you think that a die-hard industrialist is ready to suddenly admit that what he owns is not a right but an obligation? That capital no longer rules but will *be* ruled? That it's not about the life of the individual, but about that of the whole group? It's a radical and total adjustment that the grown-up is no longer capable of making. Only the young people can be changed."[83]

During a speech to leaders of the party's fighting organizations in 1933, Hitler stated, "With very few exceptions, practically all revolutions failed because their supporters did not recognize that the most essential part of a revolution is not taking power, but educating the people."[84] At an address in Berlin opening the annual winter charity drive for 1940, Hitler discussed the importance of education: "National Socialism has from the start held the view that every outlook is really the product of schooling, customs, and heredity, therefore susceptible to re-education. The child who grows up in our nation today is not genetically born with any sort of prejudices of a class-conscious origin. These have to be instilled in him.... Only in the course of a lifetime are these differences artificially forced upon him by his environs. And to eliminate this is our mission, if we don't want to despair of building a truly organic and enduring society."[85]

Hitler told German youngsters in a 1938 speech in Nuremburg that the job of inwardly transforming the population "can only be accomplished by a unified body of our people, which did not come into being through wishes and hopes, but only through education. Through it alone can we create the nation we need."[86] In this way, the Führer strove to achieve acceptance of the party's socialist program among the German people with voluntary obedience rather than compliance based on law enforcement. "With police, machine guns and rubber clubs, no regimen can be maintained in the long run," he warned.[87] In 1939, he called for drastic reduction of the national police force to release manpower to relieve the industrial labor shortage.

New legislation, public instruction and the DAF worked together to upgrade on-the-job conditions for labor. Hitler simultaneously devoted equal attention to improving housing for the working class. Revitalizing the construction industry, which was the crux of Reinhardt's program to reduce unemployment, played a crucial role in the government's social agenda as well. Without decent homes, labor could not obtain self-respect and the respect of the German community to fully integrate into national life.

Since before World War I, inadequate dwellings for the working people had been an acute problem in German society. Of available residences, 47 percent had just one to two rooms plus a kitchen. An estimated 900,000

homes suffered from overcrowding. There was a shortfall of one-and-a-half million houses. New construction added 317,682 in 1929, the peak year, but just 141,265 in 1932. Nearly half consisted of small dwellings. An estimated four to six million houses required modernization. A large percentage lacked electricity, hook-up to municipal water lines, or facilities for bath and shower.[88] A study by the DAF concluded, “In the interior of the Reich, most families are concentrated into cramped and insufficient lodgings. Because of this not only are morals, cultural awareness, health and social tranquility jeopardized, but especially the future offspring. At present around 300,000 children annually are never born, just because the miserable living conditions rob parents of the heart to bring them into the world."[89]

Hitler tackled the issue in his customary way, by addressing it as a social problem affecting the entire nation; taxpayers could subsidize construction costs of new homes. The labor ministry resisted this proposal. Its staff consisted largely of conservative economists who wished to limit spending and avoid tax increases such social programs require. The ministry promoted the *Volkswohnung*, or People’s Residence, with just two bedrooms, a kitchen and bath. During the first years of National Socialist rule, 46 percent of new home construction adopted this unpopular design. Frequently at loggerheads with the labor ministry, the DAF advocated more spacious bedrooms and the addition of a living room for family activities. The director of the Reich’s Homestead Office, Dr. Steinhauser, helped solve the problem of the additional cost for larger houses in a novel way. He involved businesses in co-financing construction of superior homes for their employees. The DAF rewarded participating companies with civic honors and favorable publicity. The campaign enjoyed widespread success.[90]



Bremen-Oslebshausen, one of the new settlements designed to provide affordable homes in natural surroundings for working class families.

Hitler became personally involved in designing four-room homes. Each was to have central heating, a combined coal/electric kitchen range and a shower with a hot water heater. The government ordered development of a basic, affordable refrigerator to replace the commercial models that were still a luxury for most families. Hitler himself decided on installing showers instead of baths in each new home. He stipulated that the stall must include a low wall to enable parents to bathe small children. Buyers had the option of ordering a bathtub as an upgrade.

In May 1938, the ground-breaking ceremony took place for Wolfsburg, a new city designed for the families of industrial workers employed at the KdF automobile assembly plant. By supporting the project, Hitler tacitly demonstrated his disapproval of the plan to relocate labor back to farms, which many National Socialists advocated. He considered the “return to the soil” program “wasted effort and money thrown away.” Wolfsburg provided comfortable, well-appointed units, avoiding what Hitler called a “monotonous pile of stacked floors like American big-city skyscrapers."[91] The plan made liberal use of space for laying out residential areas. It included landscaped corridors to screen off motor vehicle routes, plus parks, walking trails, sidewalks and bicycle paths. Eight percent of the

housing consisted of single family homes, for people who preferred gardening and yard work.

Hitler helped in details of the city planning. He determined the square footage of domiciles, insisting on large kitchens where families could dine together. The Führer conducted repeated, in-depth conferences with his court architect, Albert Speer, and Dr. Ley regarding the project. Based on Hitler's plan to construct pre-fabricated houses at the factory to be assembled on site, Ley calculated that builders could reduce construction costs by half.[92]

When Hitler appointed Ley commissioner for Social Housing Construction in November 1940, it gave the DAF director a free hand to pursue his agenda without obstruction from the labor ministry. Ley had already fought this ponderous bureaucracy to implement social security benefits for retired persons, widows and the disabled. Recipients also included orphans or children with infirmities.[93] Opponents considered the measure too costly. Under the old insurance system supported by Seldte's ministry, Ley contended that aging was the same as growing destitute. He demanded that payments be sufficient to allow the recipient to maintain a standard of living nearly equal to that during one's working life. Here too Ley triumphed, but only after years of persistent effort.

Insufficient funding also delayed legislation of a national healthcare program. When Hitler became chancellor, most working class people had no medical insurance. Labor relied on plant physicians, while ailing family members cared for one another at home. Bad lighting, factory noise, excessive toil and similar circumstances contributed to illness in the work place, so that an average of three percent of employees were absent from their jobs each day nationwide. Poor housing and lack of recreation were also detrimental to workers' health. Most people could not afford doctors, likening the profession to a fire brigade only summoned during dire emergencies. Physicians often set up shop in districts where clientele could pay more for their services. This led to a dearth of healthcare professionals in rural communities. Remote and less populated areas lacked not only doctors but clinics. The death rate among infants and small children in one poorer district polled was six percent.

Ley grappled with Reich's Director of Physicians, Dr. Leonardo Conti,

over reforms. Conti resisted the suggestion that family doctors be distributed at the discretion of the government to cover underprivileged communities, or be posted to new clinics established there. He presented the somewhat lame argument that transferring sick persons from the home environment to healing institutions contradicts the National Socialist concept of the family as the hub of society. Ley argued that allowing healthcare professionals to practice only in areas where they can earn a profit is a typically liberal perception, which neglects the welfare of the community for the benefit of the individual. He insisted that health insurance companies be disbanded and replaced by socialized medicine. Each German was to receive a medical card for life, which when presented during clinic or doctor's visits would entitle him or her to state-financed care. Conti considered the price for establishing, supplying and staffing rural clinics, plus governmental obligation to cover treatment costs, an oppressive burden on taxpayers.

Another proposal introduced by the DAF leader was that when workers have to stay home due to illness, the employer must continue to pay 70 percent of their salary. Employees absent from work to care for family members would receive the same compensation. Once again, Ley advocated tapping into the profits of industry to elevate the standard of living for labor. Ley and Conti eventually compromised, signing a national healthcare agreement at Bad Saarow in January 1941. It authorized founding of free local clinics, annual physicals for all citizens, and state-financed coverage for medical treatment of sick and injured persons. This negated the need for people to purchase medical insurance. To offset expenditures, the plan called for far-reaching "preventative medicine" measures. The DAF allotted funds to build more health spas, resorts, and other recreational facilities to serve as local weekend retreats for workers and their families. This was to improve public health through rest and relaxation.

The agreement also called for expanded educational programs to instruct citizens in maintaining wholesome lifestyles. Plant physicians received the additional task of training employees in disease prevention. The government's companion publicity campaign urged Germans to avoid indulgences detrimental to physical well-being, describing it as a civic duty to preserve one's health and not burden the community. The overall program led to a substantial reduction in premature deaths, and also

reduced time lost from work by nearly half. Thus the government, while providing healthcare for its citizens, also imposed the return obligation on the public to live responsibly.

The government's emphasis on social reform penetrated the public consciousness. It was the responsibility of every German, Hitler declared, to assist the underprivileged, the economically ruined and those no longer self-sufficient. At the 1935 party congress, he said that the German community must "help them back on their feet, must support them and incorporate them once more into the affairs of our national life."[94]

The annual Winter Help Work charity drive demonstrates how Hitler envisioned a dual purpose for public assistance: both to bring relief to the poor and to promote solidarity. Launched in the fall of 1933, the program solicited financial contributions from the population to aid the unemployed. Associates used the donations to purchase groceries, heating materials and vouchers for the needy, or to fund affiliated charitable institutions. During the winter of 1935/36, the drive assisted nearly 13 million Germans. As the Reich's employment situation improved, Winter Help Work became less necessary. Considering it "an essential means for continuously educating fellow Germans in the spirit of a German community," Hitler maintained the charity throughout his tenure in office.[95] He opened the drive each September with a well-publicized speech before a live audience in Berlin.

Strength through Joy

One of the most popular organizations to advance socialism and harmony in Germany was the DAF's recreational division, "Strength through Joy." In German KdF, its role was to provide diversion for the working population. Ley announced upon its founding, "We should not just ask what the person does on the job, but we also have the responsibility to be concerned about what the person does when off work. We have to be aware that boredom does not rejuvenate someone, but amusement in varied forms does. To organize this entertainment, this relaxation, will become our most important task."[96] Hitler considered travel an excellent activity for regenerating mind, body and spirit. Ley stated, "The Führer wants every laborer and every employee to be able to take a good-value

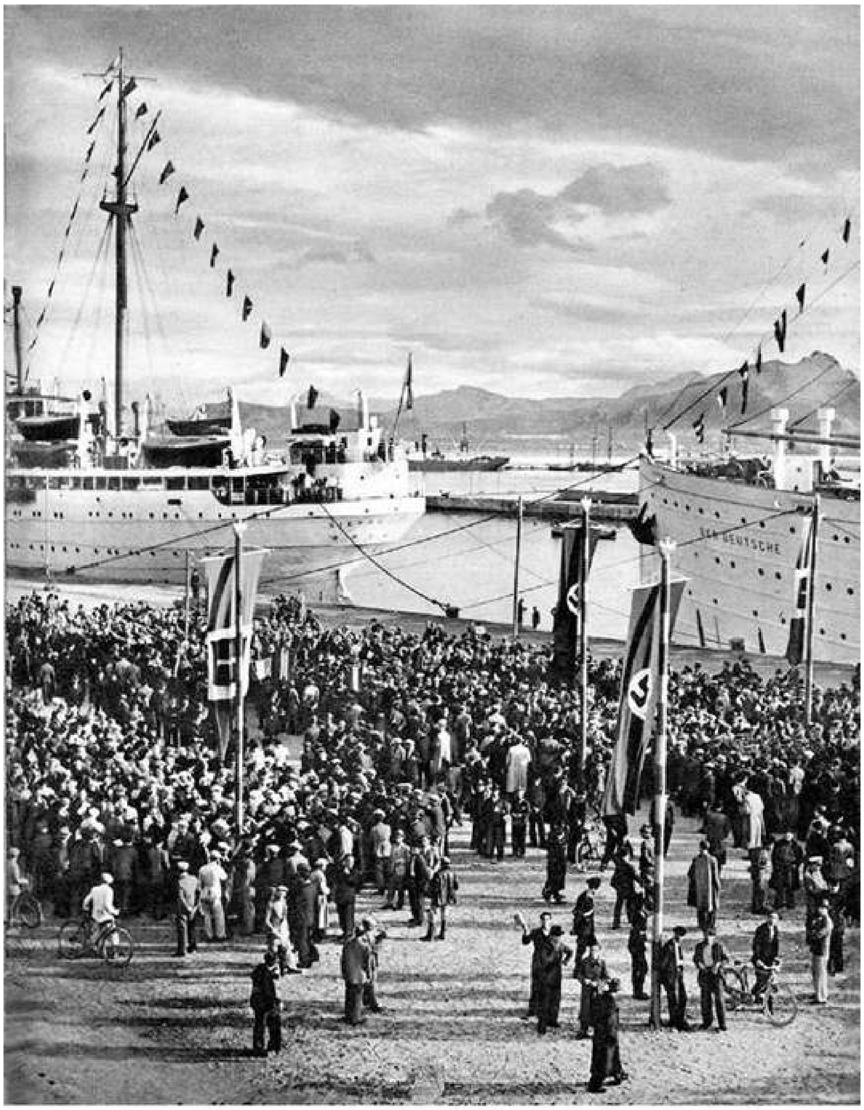
KdF trip at least once a year. In so doing, the person should not only visit the loveliest German vacation spots, but also go on sea voyages abroad."[97]

Few Germans could afford to travel prior to Hitler's chancellorship. In 1933, just 18 percent of employed persons did so. All were people with above-average salaries. The KdF began sponsoring low-cost excursions the following year, partly subsidized by the DAF, that were affordable for lower income families. Package deals covered the cost of transportation, lodging, meals and tours. Options included outings to swimming or mountain resorts, health retreats, popular attractions in cities and provinces, hiking and camping trips. In 1934, 2,120,751 people took short vacation tours. The number grew annually, with 7,080,934 participating in 1938. KdF "Wanderings"-- backpacking excursions in scenic areas— drew 60,000 the first year. In 1938 there were 1,223,362 Germans on the trails.[98] The influx of visitors boosted commerce in economically depressed resort towns.

These activities were only possible because Hitler, upon founding the "Strength through Joy" agency in November 1933, ordered all German businesses and industry to grant sufficient paid time off for employees. Prior to that year, nearly a third of the country's labor force had no union contract and hence worked without vacations. In 1931, just 30 percent of laborers with wage agreements received four to six days off per year. The majority, 61 percent, received three days."[99] The National Socialist government required that all working people be guaranteed a minimum of six days off after six months' tenure with a company. As seniority increased, the employee was to earn twelve paid vacation days per annum. The state extended the same benefits to Germany's roughly half a million *Heimarbeiter*, people holding small contracts with industry who manufactured components at home. Contracting corporations financed their holidays as well. Ley fought the labor ministry for years before finally extending the work force's paid annual leave to four weeks.

Many choosing to travel during their vacation took advantage of inexpensive cruises sponsored by the KdF. The agency initially charted two passenger ships early in 1934. On May 3, the *Dresden* left Bremerhafen with 969 vacationers for a five-day voyage. The *Monte Olivia*, carrying 1,800 passengers, put out from Hamburg the same day. Both vessels steamed to the Isle of Wight off the English coast and back. Few aboard

had ever experienced a cruise, and they returned to port exhilarated. In well-publicized interviews, travelers enthusiastically described the new KdF fleet as “dream ships for workers.” News coverage enhanced interest in the program. With applications for bookings flooding the KdF, the vessels began a continuous shuttle of five-day cruises to and from Norway, offering passengers a tour of the coastline’s majestic fjords.



Passengers of the KdF liners *Sierra Morena* and *Der Deutsche* go ashore to see the sights in Palermo, Italy.

The voyages became enormously popular, leading Ley to charter five more ships that summer. By the end of 1934, the KdF fleet had provided five-day cruises, mostly to Norway, for 80,000 German workers and their families. The KdF introduced Mediterranean cruises the following season.

Voyages to Italy allowed passengers to go ashore at Genoa, Naples, Palermo and Bari. The Portugal cruise docked at Lisbon or Madeira. During the first 1935 voyage beginning March 15, four KdF ships carried 3,000 passengers to Madeira, among them Ley. Portuguese and Italian residents of ports of call saw for the first time working class Germans enjoying a recreational activity previously associated with the upper class. During 1935, over 138,000 Germans took KdF cruises.[100]

Ley contracted the Hamburg shipyard Blohm & Voss to construct the first KdF liner in 1936. Taking considerable interest in the design, Ley insisted that all decks be free of ventilators, machinery and equipment. There was to be sufficient deck space for all the passengers to enjoy it on reclining chairs at one time. Promenade decks, game and exercise rooms, concert and dance halls, auditoriums and large, brightly lit salons with comfortable chairs were also requirements. Every passenger cabin was to face outward with portholes, and crew members were to receive cabins as well. There were no first or second class accommodations; all passenger quarters were identical in size and furnishings. Hitler attended the launching of the 25,484 ton *Wilhelm Gustloff on* May 5, 1937. At the ceremony, Ley told the crowd, “It is wonderful, amazing, it is unique in the world, that any state would endeavor to build such a great ship for its workers. We Germans don't get old tubs for our working people, but instead the best is just good enough for our German worker."[101]

With 1,465 passengers aboard, the *Wilhelm Gustloff began* its first cruise on March 15, 1938. It was a free voyage, and the guests were Blohm & Voss workers who had built the ship and their spouses, as well as female sales clerks and office personnel from Hamburg retail stores. From that day on until August 1939, the ship undertook 50 KdF cruises to Norway, Spain, Portugal, Italy or Tripoli. Employers enabled poorer working class families to participate in the vacations by voluntarily subsidizing a share of the ticket costs.[102] Some firms financed the entire cost of family cruises for employees including pocket money. The national railroad discounted fares for Germans travelling to Hamburg and Bremen by rail for KdF voyages. In March 1939, the brand new *Robert Ley*, an even larger passenger liner built for “Strength through Joy” cruises, joined the KdF fleet as its tenth ship.



German workers aboard a KdF ship view a Norwegian fjord. During 1938, over 160,000 Germans booked state-sponsored cruises to tour the Scandinavian coast and back.

The sports office of the DAF sponsored labor's involvement in other "exclusive" activities such as tennis, skiing, horseback riding and sailing. It offered inexpensive courses in these sports and built new facilities. Interest in the programs became so widespread that the DAF had to train a large number of additional instructors. In 1934 alone, 470,928 Germans took part in DAF sports courses. In 1938, the number had swollen to 22,474,906.[103] The agency also promoted sports clubs in factories and businesses. Within two years, there were over 11,000 company clubs competing in team events against those from other firms or departments.

In its endeavors to fully integrate labor into German society, the KdF introduced cultural activities as well. Its 70 music schools offered basic instruction in playing musical instruments for members of working class families. The KdF arranged theater productions and classical concerts for labor throughout the country. The 1938 Bayreuth *Festspiel*, the summer season of Richard Wagner operas, gave performances of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* for laborers and their families. The KdF also established travelling theaters and concert tours to visit rural towns in Germany where cultural events seldom took place.

The "Strength through Joy" agency's recreational programs had many positive benefits for labor. As Ley stated, it offered the working man the

opportunity “to satisfy his urge to learn more about life in all areas of endeavor, and release the forces of creativity and industriousness resting within him."[104] The goal was not just to improve the material circumstances of this stratum, but to help the workers develop an inner harmony through the balance of useful work for the nation and playful diversion during leisure time. It supported Hitler’s ambition to craft a genuinely socialist state, to which he himself contributed with various policies. For example, few in Germany could afford an automobile prior to the Führer’s order to design and mass-produce the “KdF Car,” known later as the Volkswagen. Sales of this robust, inexpensive vehicle to average-income households eliminated the status previously connected with car ownership. Generous improvements in Germany’s highway system made automobile travel practical and popular.

Hitler’s practice of instituting uniforms for the labor service, youth and women’s organizations, state and party functionaries, veterans' clubs and so forth also advanced the socialist agenda. The uniform equalized Germans, rich or poor. It identified them only as belonging to a particular group contributing to national life. Hitler stated in 1930, “We must get to a point where Germans can walk together arm in arm without respect to social position. Today unfortunately, the fine creases in one’s suit and another’s blue mechanic overalls are often a source of division."[105]

The goal of Hitler’s policies was to realize a cooperative, harmonious society, a fair and reasonable distribution of national assets, and a life for the working population as free from anxiety and want as possible. In 1942, General Walther Scherff, a military historian in the German army, summarized the popular impression of his Führer during the times: “Hitler’s principle of life was the same as that of his role model, Friedrich the Great; that it is not war, but civilized, creative activity such as works of art, social institutions, and travel routes that will bring the German people a practical, carefree and secure future existence."[106] Hitler once described himself as living for the future of his nation, for “these countless millions of people who work hard and possess so little of life."[107]

Rearming the Reich

Promoting programs to alleviate unemployment, rebuild the economy

and socially unify the nation, Hitler devoted far less attention to strengthening national defense. Provisions of the Versailles treaty had reduced the German army to a 100,000-man force comprising professional soldiers with long enlistments. It possessed no armor, heavy artillery or chemical weapons. The treaty forbade Germany to maintain an air force. Following the London Ultimatum, the Allies banned production of motorized airplanes within the Reich. This drove Germany's leading aeronautics firms Junkers, Dornier and Heinkel to continue aircraft development in Sweden, Switzerland and Russia. After World War I, the Allies had required the Reich's navy to steam its modern surface fleet to a British port. Remaining with the navy, reduced to just 15,000 sailors, were six obsolete ships of the line, six small cruisers, twelve destroyers and twelve torpedo boats. There were no submarines.



The outdated ordnance of the German army during Hitler's first years in office included model 1918 steel helmets, long-barrel Mauser carbines of World War I, and Model 1908 water-cooled machine guns.

In June 1919, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau had stated, "German disarmament represents the first step toward multilateral reduction and limitation of arms.... After Germany has shown the way, the Allied and associated powers will follow the same path in complete security."[108] Nonetheless, during the 1920s, France, Britain, the United States, Italy, Japan and the USSR had resumed a partial arms race, focusing on the expansion of naval and air forces. This breach of faith offered Germany the moral foundation to rearm in defiance of the treaty.

Thanks to the small size and limited weaponry of the German army, the country possessed virtually no armaments industry in 1933. The Germans

had to conduct secret experimental development of armored vehicles, artillery and military aircraft, since it was still illegal. Though engineers re-tooled some factories for arms production, Hitler introduced proposals for international armaments reduction during the first two years in office. During 1933 and 1934, the Reich devoted less than four percent of the budget to defense. This was not even half the percentage spent by France, Japan and the USSR, which already maintained large arsenals.[109]

Germany was in a position to implement a massive rearmament program, had Hitler wanted it, by 1936. Factories were operating at nearly full capacity. The Reich possessed a modern, efficient machine tool industry. The USA and Germany controlled 70 percent of the international export market of this commodity, with minimal corresponding import. In fact, in 1938 Germany had 1.3 million machine tools in industry, twice the number of England's.[110] This circumstance, however, proved of little value to Germany's armed forces because Hitler did not assign priority to the manufacture of military hardware.

Industry in Germany focused on housing construction, improving working conditions for labor, public works, consumer goods, and KdF automobile and ship-building programs. These projects consumed large quantities of materials such as metals, rubber and timber, and employed a significant percentage of skilled labor. Qualified tradesmen, engineers and technicians were unavailable for the arms industry. One German historian concluded, "In the six-and-a-half years until the outbreak of the war, the German economy achieved enormous success. But the result of these huge endeavors remained relatively small for the armed forces, in the face of demands from the civilian sector."[111]

One of Germany's more famous public works, the Autobahn, was without strategic value, contrary to popular assumption. The general staff concluded that the expressway system would be too easy for enemy airmen to spot from high altitude in wartime, and motorized units using the autobahn, if strafed, would have no place to take cover.[112] Few pre-war military formations were motorized anyway, and the army relied mainly on rail transport. In contrast to his senior army commanders, Freiherr von Fritsch and Ludwig Beck, Hitler fully recognized the tactical value of armor in future warfare. However, as to the expansion of this

service branch, the attention he customarily devoted to parallel civil projects was again lacking. In the opinion of a renowned military analyst, Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, “He ultimately paid the penalty for not promoting it more emphatically."[113]

In November 1934, the Army Ordnance Department opted for the manufacture of a main battle tank mounting a 75 mm cannon. The army produced two lightly armored, under-gunned types, the Panzer I and Panzer II, for troop training during development of the combat model. In the interim, the army also introduced the Panzer III medium tank, which proved suitable for frontline service. The Panzer IV, the main battle tank contracted in 1934, was actually in the planning stage before Hitler took power. The first did not roll off the assembly line until 1936. During 1936 and 1937, the factory in Magdeburg manufactured just 35 Panzer IV tanks. In 1939, the number was 45.[114]In comparison, the German automobile industry produced 244,289 cars in 1936. During the final months of peace, the German army helped fill out its few armored divisions with Czech-built tanks it acquired when occupying Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939.



Freiherr von Fritsch (left) and Ludwig Beck, pre-war army commanders who opposed tank development. Beck told General Heinz Guderian, a proponent of armor, "They're too fast for me!"

Production of other crucial ordnance suffered similar neglect. By the summer of 1939, German factories were turning out only 30 heavy field howitzers per month.[115] The manufacture of all kinds of ammunition was so limited that when war broke out in September, the army only had enough stockpiled for six weeks of combat. The air force had a three-month supply of light and medium bombs and no reserves of heavier calibers. Considering that most weapons are a means of delivering projectiles to a target, an insufficient store of ammunition decisively influences their effectiveness.

Hitler used the armed forces first as an instrument of diplomacy. He

told General Erhard Milch in 1938, “No one asks about whether I have bombs or how much ammunition I have. All that matters is the number of airplanes and cannons."[116] During 1938, Germany produced less than one-sixth the munitions its plants would manufacture throughout the war year 1944. In the verdict of General Georg Thomas, chief of the Armed Forces Armaments Staff, “Germany went to war with completely insufficient economic preparations.... The enormous economic preparations that would have been necessary for a new world war were practically not even implemented."[117]



The peacetime German army staged frequent, colorful reviews and occasional combat exhibitions for the public. This was in part to give foreign diplomats the impression that Germany already possessed a formidable military establishment.

When Hitler assumed the chancellorship, his navy was significantly

smaller than fleets of rival European powers. Between the end of World War I and 1931, German wharves laid keel on three new warships; during the same period France built 81.[118] The Anglo-German Naval Agreement, concluded in June 1935, limited the size of the Reich's surface fleet to 35 percent of Britain's Royal Navy. At war's outbreak over four years later, the German navy comprised just 17.5 percent of the tonnage of its nautical adversary; only half what was allowed. Shipbuilders had postponed the pre-war launching of Germany's formidable battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* due to a shortage of steel.[119] Simultaneous construction of the KdF liners *Wilhelm Gustloff and Robert Ley*, at a cost of over RM 50 million, continued on schedule.

Shipyards began fabricating submarines, or U-boats, around 1935. This weapon, potentially the most decisive in Germany's arsenal, received a low priority. During 1937, the year work began on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, the wharves launched just one U-boat. The Germans built nine the following year and 18 in 1939.[120] Germany began the war with 22 boats capable of Atlantic sorties, of which only a third could patrol target areas at any one time.

Military commanders met with Hitler in November 1938 to discuss coordinating rearmament among the three principle service branches. One German military historian summarized, "The vague instructions as to how these as yet unspecified armaments objectives were to be realized over the next several years, do not suggest that Hitler at this time expected to be at war just three quarters of a year later."[121] Between September 1937 and February 1939, German firms holding arms contracts filled only 58.6 percent of the orders.[122] During 1938, barely nine percent of German industry produced military wares.[123] The amount increased as the war approached, reaching around 15 percent by the end of 1939, though some estimates are slightly higher. England by contrast, spent 15 percent of her budget on rearmament in 1935 and 38 percent during 1938.[124] The economist Dr. Anja Bagel-Bohlen concluded that the Reich's "arms production in reality never received unrestricted priority in the economy as it appeared.... The German industry was in no way prepared for an extended confrontation with the enemy's industrial potential."[125]

The German army lagged well behind other Great Powers with respect

to manpower as well. In 1935, the French army numbered 655,000 men, Poland's 298,000, and the Czech army 140,000. The Soviet Union had 885,000 men under arms. None of these countries were well-disposed toward Germany. Since the Reich had had no draft for the last 15 years, there were no reservists. These are militarily-trained men who return to civilian life, but can be recalled to active duty in order to rapidly expand an armed force in the event of war. France possessed 4.5 million, Poland 3.2 million, and Czechoslovakia 1.3 million reservists.[126]

Hitler concentrated Germany's human resources on developing social programs for his people rather than on correcting the military disparity. In January 1933, the German army and navy totaled 113,523 personnel. By the end of the year, the roster rose to just 122,000. On March 21, 1935, Hitler reinstituted compulsory military service. The draft did not actually begin until October. The army added 200,000 more men, the navy 10,000. Another 20,000 joined the new air force, the Luftwaffe. The German economy had created 3.6 million new jobs by 1935. Military recruitment therefore made a small contribution to alleviating unemployment. The government in fact began increasing troop strength by transferring 56,000 policemen to the army. "The frequent argument that Hitler found the unemployed population work and bread solely through a massive build-up of the armed forces is untenable, when the actual statistics are examined," the historian Ralf Wittrich observed. [127] Schacht confirmed this when he stated, "The elimination of unemployment in Germany... succeeded without rearmament."[128]

The American historian David Schoenbaum concluded, "In many respects...the National Socialists went to war with a peacetime economy rather than having created a war-based economy in peacetime."[129] An in-depth study by professors William Langer and Everett Gleason stated, "Nazi military power and war production in 1939 were greatly overestimated by the democracies. There can now be little doubt that the Germans in 1939 were far from prepared for a long war on a large scale.. .war production was inferior to that of the combined British and French and they had very little in the way of reserves."[130]

Despite comparative unpreparedness, the German armed forces would conquer larger, better equipped armies during the early war years. The

German army’s custom of training junior officers, down to squad leader, to exercise independent initiative in combat gave Hitler’s troops a decisive tactical advantage over the French, British and Soviet armies with their inflexible command structure. Adjutant Julius Schaub later wrote that he often heard the Führer complain to his closest associates, “This damned war has ruined all my plans...it’s wrecked everything, all of my grand plans for rebuilding."[131] Hitler served in the infantry throughout World War I, and he was seriously wounded. His military service record states that he participated in 84 battles.[132] It seems unlikely that a man who experienced first-hand the devastation, privations and pointlessness of war in such measure, could aggressively prepare the nation he fought for to precipitate a similar carnage, especially considering the secondary role he historically assigned to rearmament.

The Adolf Hitler Schools

Hitler considered education of the young the key to the nation’s progressive development beyond his lifetime. In a 1937 article, SS Colonel Otto Heidler wrote that schools must now advance students “without attention to social ties, education or assessment of intellect, but according to the merits of their character.” As far as the NSDAP was concerned, universities were graduating young adults who were unfit to assume leadership positions in Germany. They largely comprised what Hitler labeled “stay-at-home types": individuals who had selfishly pursued scholastic and career objectives during the years of the party’s struggle for power. In the words of Heidler, they were “self-centered and lacking every quality of a fighting man, living their private academic life while a struggle for survival was going on throughout the entire nation."[133]

The NSDAP rejected any arrangement that prevented men who gave up personal ambition for the good of their country, often risking their lives, from attaining positions of leadership. During the years 1920-1933, many universities banned SA men, Hitler Youth leaders and NSDAP members, a substantial percentage of whom were combat veterans of World War I, from enrolling or teaching. “While they all supported the movement, others sat in their seminars and institutions, devoting themselves to their special field and profession.... They want to impress us with their knowledge. And we reply to them, you lack the basis for any sort of

wisdom, and that is character."[134] Hitler himself wrote, “Every year, hundreds of thousands of completely untalented persons are blessed with a higher education, while hundreds of thousands of others with superior ability remain without any advanced schooling. The loss to the nation cannot be overestimated."[135]

The Führer argued that it was not the function of the state “to preserve the controlling influence of an existing class of society. Instead, it is the state’s duty to draw the most capable minds from the sum of all the citizens and bring them to public office and rank.” He noted that the United States enjoys success in science and technology “because a greater number of talented individuals from among the lower strata find possibilities for a higher education than is the case in Europe."[136] By National Socialist perception, a primary task of education was to train every young adult in an occupation. The class of unskilled labor was to disappear because members of the younger generation without a trade or profession lack character.



Hitler congratulates winners of the national career competition. The popular annual program awarded scholarships and civic honors to children of working class families.

The German Labor Front launched the annual Reich’s Career Competition in 1934. Half a million boys and girls, 80 percent of whom

possessed but a rudimentary education, displayed their skills in trades and crafts. The best-scoring contestants received financial grants to pursue higher learning. An awards ceremony took place in Berlin, where national winners posed for photographs with Ley and Hitler. Schacht, who opposed the allotment of state funds to advance the lower classes, demonstratively declined Hitler's invitation to attend the function. Local and regional competitions broadened the percentage of winners and further publicized the program. The number of children taking part grew annually. In 1938, 949,120 girls and 1,537,373 boys competed. The DAF awarded RM 527,000 in scholarships that year.[137]

To further develop the trade knowledge of the younger generation, the government sponsored *Langemarck* Schools. These institutions recruited youngsters from labor and rural backgrounds. The academies initially suffered a shortage of qualified instructors. They were nonetheless another step toward Hitler's ambition, "that in this realm we are paving the way for every single able mind... toward the loftiest station in life he wants to aim for, just so long as he is capable, energetic and determined."[138] Years before assuming power, Hitler had advocated building a leadership cadre for the future of Germany. Devotion to one's nation was as important as the ability to command. He wanted to prevent aloofness or any elitist tendency from forming among those trained to be tomorrow's leaders. The problem of developing a program to select and prepare candidates fell to Ley. He first proposed establishing boarding schools with a three-year curriculum in several German townships. Upon graduation, students demonstrating the desired qualities would advance to regional boarding schools for another three years. From here, "the most capable, racially best and physically healthiest" students would enroll in the NSDAP's prestigious *Ordensburg* academies.[139] In October 1936, Ley signed an agreement with the minister of education, Dr. Bernhard Rust, authorizing the party's direct involvement in the national school system. The contract allowed the NSDAP to establish boarding schools, the Reich's Ministry of Education reserving the right to select faculty.

Ley finalized the form of the future boarding schools after deliberations with Reich's Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach. Violating the contract with Rust, Ley excluded the unprogressive minister from further involvement.

The labor leader enjoyed sufficient influence—and the DAF ample funds—to fashion a collateral school system that became virtually autonomous. It developed an independent curriculum and graduation requirements not conforming to state standards, and it established its own academy for training faculty. With the Führer's permission, Ley named the ten institutions planned for Germany the Adolf Hitler Schools (AHS). Supplemental funding from the Reich's treasury eventually allowed the addition of two more schools. The AHS boarding schools tested twelve year-olds nominated by the NSDAP district leadership. Candidates passing the entrance exam entered a six-year course. The operation of the Adolf Hitler Schools offers insight into the personal qualities National Socialism sought to cultivate in Germany's future leaders.

In December 1936, Schirach announced the founding of the new boarding schools. He appointed the 25 year-old Kurt Petter inspector of the academies. Max Klüver, also 25, designed the curriculum. The policy of recruiting young Hitler Youth leaders as instructors bypassed the Reich's Ministry of Education's technical authority to fill teaching positions. Accepting input from colleagues, Klüver developed a program free of official influence. The tight target date for opening the first Adolf Hitler School--April 15, 1937--precluded a thorough selection process for choosing students.

Unlike conventional universities, the recruitment process, reflected in the content of the entrance exam, did not focus primarily on mental aptitude. As Klüver explained, "We were not against the intellect or intelligence, but against the one-sided intellectual person who had neglected character and physical prowess, who lacked will power, decisiveness and a sense of responsibility. The colorless, indecisive and weak, the poorly grounded and irresponsible intellectual type we didn't want. Against overvalue of the intellect we set the total person, of which the intellect was of course an integral component."[140]

In designing the AHS entrance exam, the faculty hoped to assess independence of judgment, ingenuity, rapid comprehension, retention, improvisation, ability to concentrate, and imagination rather than pure knowledge. They sought the most talented youngsters from throughout Germany without Hitler's usual preference for working class families. One brochure stated, "It is a popular misconception that the Adolf Hitler

Schools are schools for the poor, for people of lesser means who would otherwise never be able to send their sons to institutions of higher learning. It should be emphasized that the Adolf Hitler Schools were not developed for a particular class in society. They are schools for the best, worthiest and most capable boys from among the German nation."[141] Teachers were aware however, that the quality of education among poorer sections of the population left some young talent undiscovered. Grading of the entrance exam took this into account. It permitted a relatively greater proportion of sons of artisans, laborers and farmers in the boarding schools than was the case in other institutions.

Instructors seldom allowed political considerations to compromise the selection of students. Despite considerable pressure and an intense confrontation with the district NSDAP leadership, Klüver himself refused to induct the son of a senior party official into an Adolf Hitler School because the boy had low test scores. By contrast, Werner Lamberz, enrolled at the Weimar AHS, was the son of a Communist who was imprisoned in a concentration camp.[142]

The curriculum of the AHS cultivated leadership qualities among students as its goal. It avoided courses designed to pile up knowledge that required substantial study time and was soon forgotten. This conformed to Hitler's definition of education's objective, which should be "to train young minds to be receptive to new ideas, and to develop powers of reasoning and observation."[143] History classes focused on a selection of more significant events that had a decisive influence on the advance of civilization rather than on a detailed chronology of the past.

The program required students to work together in study groups. Each assigned one participant as a devil's advocate to stimulate the discussions. Teachers circulated among the groups taking part in debates. The group grade influenced the scores of individual students. This practice promoted teamwork. It prevented conceit and helped pupils learn to evaluate opposing arguments, prioritize group performance over personal advancement, and work systematically to realize common objectives.

Though sanctioning customary patriotism, Adolf Hitler Schools did not indoctrinate those enrolled in excessive, dogmatic nationalism. Students broadened their understanding and tolerance of other cultures through

the course, “A Look at the World.” The purpose was to explore the political and economic circumstances of other countries, their current events and the mentality of their people. Foreign language studies and class field trips abroad supplemented the instruction. Teachers assigned each student a country that he had to become thoroughly knowledgeable about. He then shared his expertise in classroom discussion.

The open-minded attitude nurtured by AHS students contradicted the chauvinistic tendency prevalent among much of the NSDAP hierarchy. Reviewing essays by members of the first graduating class, Schirach and Ley were shocked to discover the seniors' ignorance of the National Socialist party program. Racial hygiene also played no role in the study plan.[144] This circumstance contradicted Hitler’s order, “No boy or girl shall leave school without being basically instructed in the practical necessity of maintaining the purity of our blood."[145]

The training academy for AHS faculty also remained largely free from the influence of the NSDAP. The practice of filling teaching positions with young men eliminated the type of career educator who gradually distanced himself from the vitality and spirit of the younger generation after decades of academic routine. AHS directives required the instructor to arrange social and recreational activities for individual student groups in his charge during free time. “He must energetically urge them to learn to shrug off mistakes and overcome weaknesses. But he must also remain cheerful and always ready to be at their side with friendly advice and help.... He must be a model companion, selfless, sincere and fair. Only then will he be able to acquire the necessary authority without which no leader can exist."[146]

Once a week, instructors worked with their class on assignments. One afternoon each week, teachers and pupils participated in a sporting competition together as well as singing. Conventional precepts governing student-faculty relations were not in evidence at the Adolf Hitler Schools. Instructors relied on the standard they set, rather than on the pupil’s constrained respect for the office, to maintain authority. Klüver wrote later, “There were few boarding schools in which such camaraderie and mutual trust existed between educator and student as in the AHS, not the least of which was due to the example of the instructor."[147]

Physical education played a significant role in the AHS. Hitler had often stressed fitness as necessary for young people to become decisive, responsible and determined. The AHS program stated, “Competitive sports . . . (and) skiing or flying in gliders are most important for strengthening the will and learning to endure hardships."[148] During the first years, students devoted approximately ten hours per week to physical education and sports. For fifth year students, it was eight hours. Even during wartime, there was minimal paramilitary or weapons training in the curriculum. Instead, the schools strove to cultivate a soldierly bearing in the pupils using the military values of inner confidence, facing adversity, enduring privation and summoning courage. Natural athletes did not necessarily receive the highest marks. Students whom instructors felt achieved the most within the framework of their estimated abilities—hence attained the higher level of self-mastery--better satisfied school objectives.



Fitness played a major role in Germany's educational system. The state promoted the rhythmic gymnastics developed by Hinrich Medau, designed to cultivate poise, grace, coordination and physical strength.

Most AHS instructors identified National Socialism's "one people, one leader" concept with the person of Hitler himself. None of his potential successors in the party and state hierarchy possessed the Führer's commanding, charismatic presence. Germany's future political structure, in the opinion of the AHS faculty, should therefore be an oligarchy: a select stratum where membership would be determined not by social, economic or intellectual standing, but by personal leadership qualities and devotion to country. The schools did not want to graduate automatons that blindly conformed to the party line. One period newspaper article stated, "At the Adolf Hitler Schools, those character-forming forces are at work which we need for our times. They do not however, suppress the

particular nature of the individual... but nurture and strengthen it, in this way enabling the boys to mature into independent thinking, decisive personalities."[149]

While designed to help students develop self-confidence and realize their potential, lesson plans incorporated elements intended to preclude feelings of self-importance. Difficult classroom assignments with weekly due dates required close cooperation and mutual dependency among members of individual study groups. The AHS athletic program's emphasis on team competition taught the boys that no one person matters more than the whole. On the sports field as well as in the classroom, individual pupils alternately assumed the role of team and study captains. They then rejoined the group in subordinate roles after temporary command. Field trips to mines, factories and farms combated isolation or aloofness, reminding students that the exclusive boarding school status does not divide them from the German people and the realities of their daily existence. In contrast to other boarding schools, the AHS provided no distinctive uniform for its pupils. This measure also prevented feelings of superiority.



Students at an Adolf Hitler School, wearing the standard dress of the German youth organization. There was no distinct uniform for AHS pupils.

Another departure from what was customary at similar institutions was the attention to family ties during the school year. An AHS brochure described how student-parent relations are “arranged by the school to remain as intimate as possible, to instill in the boy values that may be realized only through family life."[150] The AHS Tilsit newsletter described parents as belonging to an expanded circle of those empowered to educate the child. “They have in no sense lost their boy when enrolling him the Adolf Hitler School. In full confidence in us, they instead entrust only a part of his education to the educator. It is our wish that the boy should remain rooted in his parents' house and to his homeland. A youth

who forgets his home is without roots and unsuitable for us as well." The article also defined "close cooperation between parents and instructors" as "absolutely essential for the education and evaluation of the individual lad."[151] Instructors often visited the families of their students during holidays.

The AHS advocated ongoing parental influence as part of the policy to train its pupils to become wholesome, responsible young adults. The curriculum targeted development in three inter-related areas: mind, body and spirit. Regarding mental aptitude, it was the goal of the schools not to stuff the student's head with information, but to accustom him to working hard, expediting assignments systematically, and practicing sound judgment. The AHS's uncompromising commitment to physical education, conducive to general health and well-being, promoted self-confidence and taught classmates to subordinate self-interest and act as a team. The program's spiritual element aimed at producing independent self-starters, prepared to accept and exercise authority, to feel responsible for their actions, and to nurture humility as well as reverence for their people and their country. All elements worked together to shape the individuals envisioned to become Germany's future leadership caste. Though school officials hoped for graduates to choose a career in civil service, there was no pressure on them to do so. The Adolf Hitler Schools sought not to master Germany's most promising young adults, but to teach them to master themselves.

This method of education represented a significant departure from liberalism's practice. In order to provide equal opportunities for advancement for underachievers, the democratic state often devotes greater resources to their schooling than to that of those exhibiting superior ability. The leveling off process corresponds to the liberal principle that rejects natural ranking among individuals based on talent and personal initiative. In Germany, by contrast, certain academic institutions assigned priority to developing the potential of more gifted students. Parallel instruction in communal responsibility was supposed to insure that training such personalities for leadership roles would be of service to all.

Chapter 3

European Diplomacy

Africa

Throughout his tenure in office, Hitler was active in foreign affairs. A major goal, abolishing the restrictions imposed on Germany by the Versailles treaty, required him to negotiate with the signatory powers that had ratified it. This was an uphill battle, since these nations benefited from the compact. The Führer strove to realize his goal through non-belligerent means. The last war had provoked a Communist revolution in Russia. His own country had nearly suffered a similar fate in 1918. Hitler believed that another European conflict would be exploited by the Soviets to overthrow existing governments and “lead to the collapse of the present-day social and state order."[1]

The Reich’s chancellor weighed foreign policy decisions according to their advantages for Germany. Contrary to the cosmopolitan attitude of today’s democratic leaders, he allowed no particular obligation to the collective interests of an abstract “global community” to influence his actions. In his own words, “I cannot feel responsible for the fate of a world which showed no sympathy for the miserable plight of my own people. I regard myself as called upon by providence to serve only my own nation."[2] Great Britain and France were among the primary advocates of the Versailles system. Though aware of the treaty’s injustices, neither of their governments initiated a single voluntary concession to Germany from 1920-1939.

The objective of National Socialist foreign affairs was securing Lebensraum, sufficient living space to provide nourishment for Germany’s increasing population and natural resources for industry. A serious hindrance to economic well-being was her lack of overseas colonies. Prior to World War I, the control of expansive territories in Africa had provided the imperial Reich with raw materials. Nearly 12,000,000 native

inhabitants had offered a market for German manufactured goods, and the flourishing trade had made a substantial contribution to industrial growth and prosperity.

Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, which lulled the Reich's Government into accepting an armistice in 1918, promised "a free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims." This proved to be an illusion. In Africa, France gained the former German colony of Kamerun totaling nearly 50,000 square miles. The Versailles settlement awarded Ruanda and Burundi to Belgium. England took the lion's share, incorporating German East Africa, German Southwest Africa and Togo, augmenting the British Empire by over 630,000 square miles. Italy received about 50,000 square miles. Britain and Japan divided Germany's Pacific colonies.

The Allies classified the seized colonies as mandate states that England and France administered as trustees. This avoided the appearance of outright annexation, which would have raised the inconvenient argument that so much valuable territory appropriated from Germany should be credited to the reparations account. The League of Nations charter stated that administering colonies "inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world" was a "sacred trust of civilization."[3] It sanctioned Anglo-French colonial administration as a blessing for underdeveloped nations, overlooking the fact that Syria, India, Egypt and several other countries under British and European subjugation had requested independence after World War I.



Several thousand German settlers returned to Southwest Africa after World War I despite British "mandate" administration. Here ethnic German students on a field trip visit with indigenous villagers in 1938.

The peace treaty created other obstacles for German commerce. Beginning in 1922, the Allies imposed a 26 percent duty on all German export wares. Despite this disadvantage, Germany continued to conduct overseas trade in order to meet reparations payments and import necessities previously available from Africa. The Germans' profit margin was too small to alleviate the economic distress to industry. A German delegate at Versailles, Otto Landsberg, stated, "This peace is a slow murder of the German people."[4] The worldwide financial crisis caused German exports to sink by two thirds between 1930 and 1933.

Hitler publicly reopened the colonial issue in September 1935. Speaking in Nuremberg, he announced that Germany would not relinquish her claims in Africa. Days later, Britain's foreign secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, addressed the topic before the League of Nations in Geneva. Dismissing the notion that the ex-German colonies should be returned, Hoare argued that it was necessary only to guarantee that countries without possessions on the Dark Continent should have fair access to their natural resources through an "open door" policy. Berlin pointed out that the mother countries England, France, and Belgium would unavoidably enjoy preference in trade. The option to buy raw materials from mandate states

was of little use to Germany anyway; she lacked the purchasing power to do so, thanks to the loss of her colonies. Nearly a year and a half passed before the League of Nations appointed a committee to investigate. Its findings endorsed Hoare's position.[5]

In 1936, Hitler authorized Schacht to negotiate settlements with France and England regarding some of their major differences with Germany. Schacht introduced a proposal to change the status of French-controlled Kamerun and of Togo, Britain's smaller African acquisition. Under the plan, the Germans would assume economic management of, but not sovereignty over, the two mandate states. Both would maintain an open door trade policy with other countries as Hoare had suggested, while the Reich would enjoy commercial advantages to compensate for the previous forfeiture of its African territories. The compromise avoided the impression that the Allies were returning the German colonies, which would have represented a tacit admission that their seizure was unjust. Considering Germany's poverty of natural resources and the pride of its population, Schacht's proposal was moderate. London and Paris categorically rejected it the following winter.[6]

Subsequent personal dialogs between Hitler and British statesmen proved equally fruitless. In November 1937, the Führer hosted the English emissary Lord Halifax at Berchtesgaden. He asked his guest what London proposed regarding Africa. Halifax admitted that "the mistakes of the Versailles treaty must be set right."[7] He stipulated that England could not negotiate this without the other continental powers and that redistribution of the colonies could only take place within the framework of an overall European settlement. Halifax offered no proposals.

The following March, Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador in Berlin, warned Hitler that English public opinion was "especially sensitive" about the African issue. He vaguely suggested that Germany could perhaps receive administration of the Congo. This was not even a British dominion. Hitler questioned the purpose of such an arrangement, instead of solving the colonial problem "in the simplest and most natural way, namely by giving back the German colonies." He again pledged not to force the issue, expressing willingness to "patiently wait four, six or ten years" for a favorable solution. As for the genuine attitude of the British government, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain confided to his cabinet a year later

that discussing with Germany the return of her colonies was "completely out of the question."[8] In March 1939, British Secretary of Trade Robert Hudson told the German economist Helmuth Wohlthat that the English people would never accept the transfer. For his part, Hitler kept the promise once made to Chamberlain, that he would not present Germany's appeal as a "belligerent demand."[9]

Geneva

With Germany lacking colonies, Hitler consolidated the Reich's commercial position on the continent, focusing on the southeastern European market. This coincided with his intention to regain frontier provinces of Germany proper, some with valuable industry, which the Versailles construction took from the Reich and awarded to neighboring states. Italy, France, Belgium, Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia now controlled territories populated by ethnic Germans, whose loss weakened Germany.

The diplomatic question that received Hitler's initial priority was national security. Article 160 of the treaty stated that the armed forces, the *Reichswehr*, may be deployed "exclusively for maintaining order within German territory and as border police."[10] The Allies therefore denied Germany the right to protect her frontiers from foreign aggression.

The lack of adequate defense forces had already caused negative consequences for the Reich. When the Germans fell 1.6 percent behind on the crippling reparations payments to France, the French and Belgian armies militarily occupied the Ruhr industrial region in January 1923. In Essen, French troops shot 14 German miners resisting the invaders' attempt to confiscate coal. Others the French arrested and deported to France's colonies. They forced 80,000 Germans to leave their homes in the Ruhr and relocate further into Germany.[11] Clemenceau told his secretary, "We'll stay longer than 15 years, we'll stay 100 years if we must, until they pay what they owe us. . . . And after we've withdrawn, if these swine violate their obligation then fine, we'll occupy again."[12] French and Belgian troops remained until the summer of 1925.



French officers leading North African colonial horsemen. During the 1923 occupation of the Ruhr, Marshal Ferdinand Foch demanded brothels for his Moroccan soldiers, remarking that "German women are good enough for the purpose."

The governments of Germany and Austria arranged to form a customs union in 1931. The elimination of tariffs would boost commerce between the two countries and lessen the economic distress, particularly in Austria. France interpreted this "fearsome bloc" of her former antagonists as a violation of the Treaty of St. Germaine, which forbade Austria to become part of the Reich. Paris threatened to boycott German wares and initiate price wars to disrupt continental trade. Possessing the largest army in Europe, France was in a position to dictate terms without arbitration. That September, Austrian Chancellor Johannes Schober announced that his government would abandon plans for a trade agreement with Germany. U.S. President Hoover remarked, "A customs union with a little country of six million can scarcely be conceived as a serious threat. . . . This is nothing more than a new, crass example of European power politics."[13] The incident demonstrated that without armed forces, Germany and Austria would remain unable to conduct an independent foreign policy.

The League of Nations had been holding preliminary talks for several years in preparation for a universal disarmament conference scheduled for

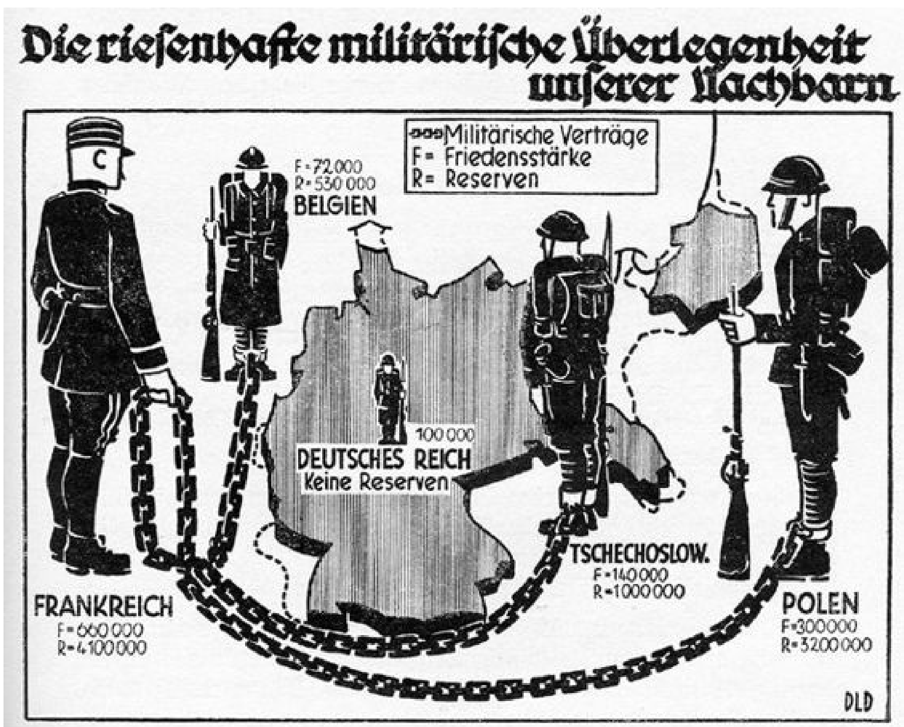
1932. In February 1927, Belgian Foreign Minister Emile Vandervelde predicted, “Either the other powers must reduce their armies in proportion to the German *Reichswehr*, or the peace treaty becomes invalid and Germany claims the right to possess fighting forces capable of defending her territory."[14]

The disarmament conference opened in Geneva in February 1932. Germany, a member of the League since 1927, demanded military parity with the other European powers. Delegates debated the issue for over four months without progress. In June, President Hoover proposed the reduction by two thirds of all ground and naval forces. He recommended sending bombers to the scrap yard and banning strategic aerial bombardment. The plan found favor with Italy and the USSR, but France rejected it.

Berlin saw in Franco-German dissonance a primary hindrance to the conference. On August 23, 1932, the *Reichswehr* and the Reich’s Foreign Office therefore asked France’s ambassador, Andre Francois-Poncet, for a private audience. At the meeting, General Kurt von Schleicher presented moderate suggestions to Francois-Poncet. Germany wished to develop prototypes of combat aircraft, armored vehicles and heavy artillery, but pledged not to put them into mass production. Schleicher’s plan called for an increase in military personnel by 30,000 soldiers per year. Considering that the French army numbered 655,000 men, it would take the Reich over 18 years to achieve parity. Further, the 30,000 annual recruits would serve an enlistment of just three months. Paris rejected Berlin’s modest proposals in a note on September 11, 1932. The French bluntly reminded the Germans of their obligation to observe the arms limitations imposed by the Versailles treaty.

Within two days, the Germans notified the president of the Geneva conference that Germany was withdrawing from the talks. Three months later, England, France, and Italy conceded that “Germany must receive the same rights in a security system valid for all nations,” and that this would be on the agenda.[15] The German delegation thereupon returned to Geneva. This was the state of Europe’s arms race when Hitler became chancellor in January 1933. He inherited a military establishment whose ordnance department had recently estimated that there was only enough ammunition stockpiled for one hour of combat.

British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald introduced a comprehensive armaments plan on March 16. It permitted Germany to double the size of the *Reichswehr* to 200,000 men. It called for France to reduce her continental army to the same number, but granted her an additional 200,000 to police the colonies. MacDonald proposed a 200,000-man fighting force for Italy as well, plus 50,000 more for her overseas possessions. The USSR would maintain 500,000 men under arms, Poland 200,000, and Czechoslovakia 100,000. All countries except Germany would have an air force. Almost every nation affected responded favorably. France however, categorically rejected the plan.



"The enormous military superiority of our neighbors", an illustration published in 1933, showed how the armed forces of countries surrounding Germany dwarfed her own defenses. The chain represents alliances, "F" stands for the peacetime strength of the armies, "R" for the number of reservists.

The German diplomat Freiherrn von Freytagh-Loringhoven summarized the implications confronting Hitler in his deliberations: "The forces it allowed Germany in no way guaranteed her parity with the other Great Powers, nor corresponded to the size of her population and natural resources.... Germany would be permitted to maintain a field army of 200,000 men. France on the other hand, was promised 200,000 men for

the mother country and just as many for the colonies. In case of war these colonial troops would be immediately transported to Europe, so France would have twice as strong a standing army right from the start, not even including reservists. For Poland too, whose population is just half of Germany's, the plan also envisioned 200,000 men. Considering the entire French alliance system...there would be a fighting force on the French side of 1,025,000 men, whereas Germany could only parry with an army one fifth as strong."[16]

In the Reichstag on May 17, 1933, Hitler publicly responded: "Germany would be ready without delay to disband her entire military establishment and destroy what little remains of her arsenal, if the other nations involved will do the same. But if the other states are unwilling to implement the conditions of disarmament the peace treaty of Versailles obligates them to, then Germany must at least insist on her right to parity. The German government sees in the English plan a possible basis to solve these questions. . . . Germany therefore agrees in essence to accept a transitional period of five years for the establishment of her national security, in the expectation that Germany's equal footing with the other states will result."[17]

The only objection to MacDonald's proposal Hitler posed was that his country should be permitted to develop an air force. Since the 1932 *Reichswehr* plan envisioned a maximum of just 200 planes by 1938, this was a minor exception. The Führer's acceptance of the MacDonald plan meant leaving Germany virtually defenseless for nearly five years, basing national security purely on the good faith of neighboring powers to honor the agreement; an obligation which they had not met so far. Even after the five year period, the *Reichswehr* would be heavily outnumbered and outgunned. As Hitler pointed out in his speech, "The only nation justified in fearing an invasion is Germany."[18]

Hitler's approval of the MacDonald plan received mixed reviews. The chairman of the conference, Arthur Henderson, stated on May 19 that Hitler's speech clearly demonstrates that Germany's desire to achieve balance rests not with expanding the *Reichswehr*, but with multilateral disarmament. Anthony Eden, representing Britain in Geneva, called the speech encouraging. The American delegate, Norman Davis, declared his country's readiness to accept MacDonald's proposals. Only France reacted

unfavorably. At the session in Geneva on May 23, the French delegate, Paul Boncour, insisted that Germany's political organizations, the *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets), SA, and SS, represent a military fighting force augmenting the size of the Germany army by nearly a million men.

In his May 17 speech, Hitler defended the *Stahlhelm* as a veterans' society preserving the comradeship forged in World War I. Its members had helped quell Communist uprisings in the Reich from 1919 to 1923. He added, "In a few years, the SA and SS lost over 350 dead and 40,000 injured as a result of Communist murder attempts and terrorism. If Geneva counts these organizations serving an exclusively internal political purpose as part of the army, then the fire department, athletic associations, police societies, gun lodges, sailing clubs, and other sports leagues might as well also be considered armed forces."[19] Hitler in fact had no interest in militarizing the party's affiliates. The *Stahlhelm* soon all but disappeared, and SA chief Ernst Roehm caused so much trouble demanding that his storm troops, not the army, take over national defense that Hitler had him shot a year later.



The SA, which provided muscle for the NSDAP before 1933.

During a recess at Geneva, French statesmen conducted confidential deliberations with England and the United States regarding the MacDonald plan. Supported by the French press, Paris advocated a minimum four year

period before even *initiating* multilateral disarmament. The German army, they recommended, should be restructured, replacing the present system of long-term enlistments with an active duty tour of eight months for every soldier. Under this arrangement, the *Reichswehr* would forfeit in less than a year its professional officer corps and NCO cadre of instructors. On October 7, the German government announced its acceptance of the proposal. The Reich agreed not to develop offensive weapons such as heavy artillery, bombers and heavy tanks. With the exception of a demand for modern *defensive* weaponry, Hitler voluntarily agreed to the reshaping of his country's armed forces by a foreign power.

One week later, a British delegate, Sir John Simon, announced revisions to the MacDonald plan based on consultation with other nations. He extended the original five-year disarmament period - which Hitler had already accepted - to eight years. The new arrangement expressly forbade all signatories from producing more weapons. The Germans therefore would not have the right to sufficiently arm the additional 100,000 soldiers the plan allowed for. Germany withdrew from the conference the same day, and from the League of Nations.

Despite the concessions Hitler had offered, he reaped harsh criticism from the international press. As Freytagh-Loringhoven summarized, "Most of its readers must have gained the impression that Germany frivolously sabotaged all the grand work toward disarmament, and by withdrawing from the Geneva League of Nations, parted ways with the community of civilized states."[20] America's new president, Franklin Roosevelt, had already told a German emissary that he considered "Germany the only possible obstacle to a disarmament treaty."[21] The military advisor with the English delegation to the disarmament conference sent a report to the Foreign Office in London, describing Hitler as a "mad dog running around loose" who needs to be "either destroyed or locked away."[22] The permanent undersecretary in the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittart, added a note of approval to the document and distributed copies to the staff. French newspapers published bogus reports of secret German war plans. *Le Journal* in Paris described how *Stahlhelm*, SS and SA men receive extensive combat training from the *Reichswehr*.[23]

Explaining Germany's withdrawal from Geneva on October 14, Hitler

reminded his countrymen how the Allies had pledged in their own peace treaty to reduce their military establishments. "Our delegates were then told by official representatives of the other states in public speeches and direct declarations that at the present time, Germany could no longer be granted equal rights." The Führer maintained that "the German people and their government were repeatedly humiliated" during the negotiations. He concluded that this "world peace, so ultimately necessary for us all, can only be achieved when the concepts of victor and vanquished are supplanted by the loftier vision of the equal right to life for everyone."[24]

Conscious of the gravity of this foreign policy decision, Hitler presented it to the German public for approval. He asked Reich's President Paul von Hindenburg to authorize new parliamentary elections coupled with a referendum on Geneva. The Führer repeated his position on the League to employees of the Siemens factory in Berlin on November 10, and the national radio broadcast the speech. In the referendum two days later, 95 percent of German voters endorsed their chancellor's break with Geneva.

Even after leaving the League that October, Hitler still sought rapprochement. In January 1934, he petitioned Geneva to approve a 300,000-man army for his country. The British government asked him to settle for a force somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 instead. Hitler agreed. France's foreign minister, Jean-Louis Barthou, insisted that the SA be counted as part of Germany's army. The Führer expressed willingness to eliminate the SA's paramilitary structure. He stood firm for an air force, but pledged not to expand its size beyond 50 percent of that of France. He completely renounced German development of bombers. Hitler was content to wait five years for the Great Powers to *begin* arms reduction, if France would accept the proposals.



Hitler arrives at the Siemens factory in Berlin for his foreign policy speech on November 10, 1933.

Many prominent Frenchmen endorsed the compromise. The novelist Alphonse de Chateaubriant observed, “Germany neither seeks war with France nor even considers it.” Henri Pichot stated, “The youth who did not experience the war don't know what war is. It’s up to us to tell them. It is our duty, and that of those we fought, to build bridges across the trenches that still divide us."[25] France’s ambassador in Berlin, Francois-Poncet, supported the compromise with Germany. French statesman Andre Tardieu told him, “You're wasting your time! The agreement you advocate will never be concluded. We'll never sign it. Hitler won't be at the helm much longer. . . . When war breaks out, a week won't pass before he’s ousted and replaced by the crown prince."[26] On April 17, 1934, Barthou issued an official reply to the British mediation plan and Hitler’s offer: “The French government formally refuses to allow Germany to rearm.... From now on, France will guarantee her security through her own

resources."[27] This caused the collapse of the Geneva disarmament conference.

France

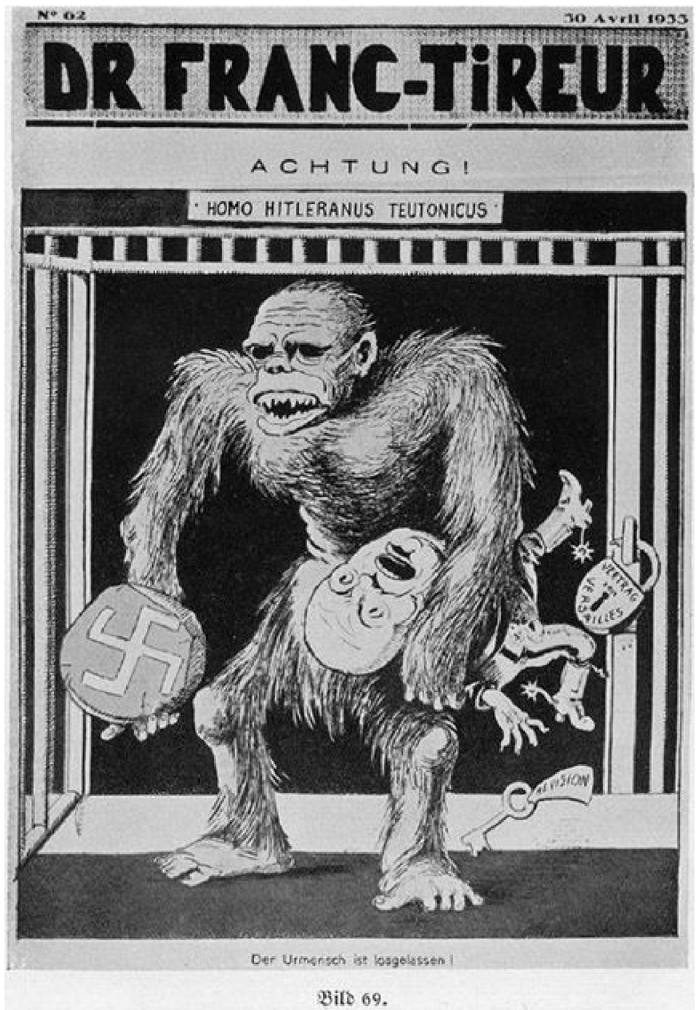
Bordering France, the Saar is a 741-square mile German mining region just south of Luxembourg. During the 1919 peace conference, France sought to annex the Saar. Clemenceau falsely claimed that the province's ethnic French colony numbered 150,000. He protested that a post-war German administration of the Saar would rob the inhabitants of the opportunity "to enjoy the freedom the French government wants to give them."[28] Wilson and Lloyd George, however, arranged for the region to come under League of Nations jurisdiction for 15 years. The population could then vote whether the Saar should return to Germany, join France, or maintain status quo.

From 1920 to 1935, the five-member Saar Commission governed the region. French became the official language in public schools. The German miners opted for their own ethnic schools. German societies supported their children's education through traveling libraries, delivering German language study books to even remote villages. The French arrested Hermann Röchling, a publisher and sponsor of the program.[29] Violating the Versailles treaty, Paris transferred 5,000 soldiers to the Saar. They expelled most of the German civil servants and replaced them with French officials. The French assumed control of the coal industry.

Political analysts - German and French alike - predicted that the overwhelming majority of voters would cast for reunion with Germany in the 1935 plebiscite. Paris encouraged the population to vote for status quo. This would deprive Hitler of a strategic buffer dividing the two powers. France recruited German Communists, former trade union officials, and other opponents of the Hitler administration who had migrated to the Saar in 1933 to campaign for status quo; their propaganda vehemently criticized National Socialism.

The media campaign marred Franco-German relations. Hitler expressed his concern in a well-publicized interview on November 24, 1934, with the chairman of the Union of French Front Fighters, Jean Goy: "The French

press draws the conclusion that we Germans are preparing a coup. It's pure insanity to think that Germany would want to disrupt the coming plebiscite by resorting to force. We will accept the results of the plebiscite no matter how it turns out." Hitler added that he had once suggested to Barthou that the pair draft a joint protocol to regulate "eventual difficulties" that might surface, "but never received an answer."[30]



France's attitude toward Germany during the 1930's opposed reconciliation. A French magazine in Alsace-Lorraine depicted the German as a savage primate who would wreak havoc if released from the cage of Versailles.

Hitler proposed cancelling the plebiscite in favor of a more cordial settlement: The Saar would return to Germany, and French industry would retain control of its coal-rich natural resources. This was a magnanimous

gesture, considering that Hitler expected to carry the vote: Hundreds of thousands of Saar residents had crossed into Germany in special trains and motor columns to attend his campaign speech in Koblenz the previous August. Paris rejected the proposal. Supervised by the League of Nations, the plebiscite took place on January 13, 1935. The result was a landslide, with 90.8 percent of the voters casting for union with Germany, 8.8 percent favoring status quo, and just 2,124 out of 526,857 eligible voters opting for France.

With the plebiscite settled, Hitler hoped for better relations with France. He had already renounced any future claim to Alsace-Lorraine. This was a large frontier region of mixed heritage which Germany had annexed from France in 1871. Clemenceau reclaimed the territory after 1918. Hitler explained to Jean Goy in 1934, "It would be no solution to wage war every 20 or 30 years to take back provinces that always cause France problems when they're French, and Germany when they're German."[31] In his official proclamation announcing the recovery of the Saar, he described it as a "decisive step on the road to reconciliation" with France.

On March 6, the French reacted to the Saar plebiscite by extending military enlistments to two years. Soldiers scheduled for discharge remained on active duty, gradually expanding the size of the armed forces. Paris then announced a proposed mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. This would pledge military support in case a signatory "is exposed to the threat or danger of attack from a European state."[32] With 45 French army divisions already stationed near Germany's frontier, Hitler announced on March 16 that his government would no longer comply with the Versailles armament restrictions. He introduced compulsory military service with one-year enlistments.

Hitler summoned Dr. Friedrich Grimm, an authority on international law, to the chancery. The Führer was preparing his Reichstag speech to justify instituting the draft. He asked his guest, "Were you in my place, how would you explain the legal issue?" Grimm replied, "We're in the right. According to the Versailles treaty, the obligation to disarm is a mutual legal obligation. We've already done so. We've disarmed. This the opponents officially acknowledge. But they have not followed with their own disarmament. They're in arrears. Germany therefore demands

freedom of action. It’s amazing that the Reich’s Government was so patient and accepted this circumstance for over 15 years."[33]

In his Reichstag speech on March 21, 1935, Hitler announced his intention to build an armed force that was “not an instrument of belligerent attack, but exclusively for defense and in this way to maintain peace."[34] He included a renewed, fruitless proposal for all industrial nations to outlaw aerial bombardment and limit naval armaments, heavy artillery and armor. The German diplomat Joachim von Ribbentrop met with Grimm at the *Kaiserhqf* Hotel in Berlin. Hitler wished to promote better relations through the German-French Society, founded in 1934, with its sister association in France, the *Comité France-Allemagne*. Ribbentrop asked that Grimm become president of the Berlin-based society, a post he accepted. The German government sponsored the activities with financial aid, while the French counterpart had to rely on private contributions in its own country.

The Franco-Soviet agreement tarnished relations between Paris and Berlin. On May 25, the Germans protested that it violated the 1925 Locarno Pact. In this compact, France, Belgium, and Germany pledged “under no circumstances to attack, fall upon, or wage war against one another."[35] The German government argued that the Franco-Soviet understanding was directed against the Reich.

In January 1936, Hitler attempted again to persuade France to change course by offering a non-aggression pact. Paris refused. The French described their arrangement with the USSR as purely political and not a military alliance, hence not repugnant to the spirit of Locarno. In February however, Soviet Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky met in Paris with General Maurice Gamelin, commander-in-chief of the French army. The German intelligence service, the *Abwehr*, learned that the French general staff was preparing a plan to coordinate operations with the Red Army. The blueprint envisioned a French advance into the demilitarized Rhineland, together with a thrust further south to link up with Soviet forces invading Germany from the east.[36]

Hitler granted a cordial interview to the French journalist Bertrand de Jouvenel in mid-February at Berchtesgaden. German newspapers published the interview on the front page, including Hitler’s retractions of

anti-French statements he previously wrote in *Mein Kampf*. The German diplomat Otto Abetz, who had arranged the Jouvenel interview, delivered a copy of it to Paris. The French press delayed publication until after the chamber of deputies ratified the Franco-Soviet pact on February 27. The following morning, the Jouvenel interview appeared in the *Paris Midi*.

Had the French public read Hitler's placatory comments sooner, this might have cast doubt on France's need for a security pact with the USSR. Publishing the interview after its ratification gave the appearance that fear, not good will, had prompted Hitler's offer of friendship. The French newspaper *Oeuvre* even wrote that the Führer gave the interview *after* the Soviet treaty's ratification. The affair left Hitler mortified and angry.

Informed of Franco-Soviet general staff talks, the Führer became concerned that the demilitarized Rhineland represented an open door for France to invade. He responded by transferring 19 infantry battalions to garrison Aachen, Saarbriicken and Trier, and then other Rhineland cities. He publicly withdrew Germany from the Locarno pact, by which the Reich had agreed to keep the province free of troops.

The Reich's Foreign Office pointed out that France already maintained military alliances with Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia. She had constructed a formidable line of frontier fortifications bordering Germany, concentrating an "enormous mass of troops" there. "France nonetheless still feels it necessary to have to rely on the support of the huge Soviet empire. And Germany has never provided the remotest grounds for France to feel threatened." . . . Paris "describes the 19 battalions entering (the Rhineland) as a threat to French security, which is guaranteed by practically half the world."[37]

Hitler proposed that both France and Germany withdraw military units from borderline areas and that Belgium, Germany and France conclude a 25-year non-aggression pact and establish an international court of arbitration to enforce compacts "whose decisions shall be binding on all parties." The Reich offered to return to the League of Nations for a new multilateral disarmament conference. The proposal stated, "Germany and France...pledge to take steps to see that regarding the education of the young, as well as in the press and publications of both nations, everything shall be avoided which might be calculated to poison the relationship

between the two peoples."[38]

The French government responded by placing the army on alert. It transferred North African divisions from southern France to the German frontier. It unsuccessfully petitioned Britain to mobilize her army. The English delegate to the League of Nations concluded, “The reoccupation of the Rhineland...in no sense diminishes (French) security."[39] In Paris, Grimm summarized the public attitude among his hosts: “The French people think that Hitler wants to attack France."[40] Complaining to the French statesman, Camille Chautemps, about war scares in the French news media, Grimm warned, “If this keeps up, it will surely be the press that one day drives the nations back to war.” Chautemps shrugged in response, “We're a democracy. We have freedom of the press."[41]

From 1932 to 1936, the German government introduced seven proposals to limit or reduce world armaments. In none of these did the Reich demand parity: Hitler offered to maintain an air force half the size of France’s and was prepared to accept a national defense force vastly inferior to the combined strength of surrounding countries allied to one another. He appealed to the Great Powers to abolish offensive weapons and outlaw aerial bombardment. He was the only European leader willing to entrust the security of his nation to the good faith of neighboring states—an astonishing concession for an industrial power. None of Germany’s proposals kindled interest among the former enemy coalition. It pursued an escalating arms race, and denounced Hitler as a warmonger.

Austria

Austria-Hungary, ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty, had been Germany’s ally during World War I. In 1919, the victorious powers dismembered this vast, motley empire. Hungary and Czechoslovakia became independent countries. Other components fell to Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Italy. Multiple cultures often populated each region. It was impossible to apportion provinces to their respective new countries without placing some of the ethnic colonies inhabiting them under the dominion of the prevailing foreign nationality. Austria, the nucleus of the old realm, shrunk from sovereignty over nearly 30 million people to a diminutive, landlocked republic of 6,500,000 persons.

Southern and eastern Europe's smaller nations had traditionally belonged to larger empires. The decision to establish independent states for them conformed to Wilson's proclaimed ideal of self-determination; the right of every people to govern themselves. U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing interpreted Wilson's cartographic experiment as follows: "If the right of self-determination were sound in principle and uniformly applicable in establishing political allegiance and territorial sovereignty, the endeavor of the Southern States to secede from the American Union in 1861 would have been wholly justifiable."[42]

On November 12, 1918, Austria's provisional national assembly declared its country "a component of the German republic." It officially adopted the name "German Austria." This contradicted the Allied objective of eliminating the former Central Powers as a future rival. To sanction the Austrian-German union would have helped restore the Reich to its pre-war magnitude. It would also have facilitated German economic influence in the Balkan and Danube regions.

Allied delegates at the peace conference informed Austria that she must "abstain from any act which might directly or indirectly, or by any means whatsoever, compromise her independence."[43] It also forbade the country from using the name German-Austria. Chancellor Karl Renner protested to the Allies that this violates the population's right to self-determination, to which they responded that this right does not extend to defeated enemy countries. Britain forced Vienna to comply by threatening to resume the blockade of foodstuffs.

Post-war Austria became the only part of the former Habsburg realm from which the Entente demanded reparations. Deprived of its industrial base, which fell to Czechoslovakia, Hungary's agrarian economy and the Danube export market, this was catastrophic for the little country. Discharged soldiers and German-speaking civil servants from the lost provinces returned to the homeland, unable to find work. Unemployment rose to 557,000.[44]

Most Austrians favored unification with Germany. Hitler, reared in Linz, shared this sentiment. In April 1934, he assigned the Reich's Foreign Office to prepare a report defining policy. Regarding possible annexation of the country, the report opined that "German efforts in this direction

will be frustrated by the unanimous resistance of all European Great Powers."[45] In a Reichstag speech in May, Hitler declared, “The German people and the German government have, out of the simple feeling of solidarity toward common national heritage, the understandable wish that not just foreign peoples, but also German people everywhere will be guaranteed the right to self-determination."[46]

The Austrian government had become a dictatorship. In 1931, the country elected Engelbert Dollfuss *Bundeskanzler* (National Chancellor). He dissolved parliament in 1933, founded the Fatherland Front, and proscribed other political parties. Dollfuss established detention camps in September, which corralled members of the Communist and National Socialist parties. Dollfuss reinstituted the death penalty. The following February, he ordered the police to disarm the Social Democrats' Defense League. This led to armed resistance in Vienna and in Linz. Dollfuss deployed the army, which bombarded workers' housing districts in the capital with artillery. Over 300 people died in the fighting. Having suppressed the revolt, he banned the Social Democratic Party, abolished the trade unions, and hanged eleven Defense League members.

The bantam dictator died in July 1934, during an equally abortive coup staged by Vienna’s National Socialist underground. Minister of Justice Kurt Schussnigg replaced Dollfuss. Under the new chancellor, 13 of the conspirators received death sentences, based on a proposed statute not signed into law until the day after their execution. The police arrested the chief defense attorney three days after the trial. Without a hearing, he spent the next six months in the Wöllersdorf detention camp.[47]

Having attained power without a single vote, Schussnigg relied on the Fatherland Front to maintain the dictatorship. Political dissidents, lumped together as “national opposition,” landed in concentration camps. Documented cases of inmate abuse include confinement without trial, house arrest for prisoners' relatives, two or more trials and sentences for the same crime, convictions and fines without evidence, the presumption of guilt until proven innocent, withholding medical care from inmates who were ill, sometimes resulting in death, and forced confessions.[48] The regime denied persons of “deficient civic reliability” the right to practice their occupation. Schussnigg judicially persecuted Austrians who favored

unification with the Reich. The verdict often fell on members of choral societies and sports clubs nurturing cultural ties with Germany. “Suspicion of nationalistic convictions” cost civil servants their jobs. This included forfeiture of pension and loss of unemployment compensation.

The dictator sought an alliance with Italy to support Austrian sovereignty. The Italian head of state, Benito Mussolini, anticipated that an Austrian-German union would jeopardize his country’s control of southern Tirol. The Entente had awarded this province, populated by 250,000 ethnic Germans, to Italy after World War I. During Dollfuss’s tenure, Mussolini had supplied aid to Austria. The new *Bundeskanzler* failed to maintain the good relationship that Dollfuss had cultivated with Rome. The vivacious Mussolini did not relate well to the austere, impersonal Schussnigg. The Austrian government’s human rights violations alienated France and Czechoslovakia. The Italian-German dissonance that Schussnigg hoped to capitalize on diminished in 1936. When Italy invaded Abyssinia, she was able to defy League of Nations sanctions through Hitler’s economic support. Mussolini advised Schussnigg to normalize relations with Germany.

Hitler, unjustly blamed for the 1934 coup to topple Dollfuss, sought to break the diplomatic deadlock. He appointed Franz von Papen, a conservative aristocrat distant to National Socialism and a devout Catholic, special ambassador to Vienna. Papen presented Austrian Foreign Minister Egon Berger with the draft for an Austrian-German “Gentleman’s Agreement.” The compact corroborated Hitler’s strategy for incorporating Austria as an evolutionary process, promoting economic and cultural ties between both countries.[49]

The preamble stated, “The German Reich’s Government recognizes the complete sovereignty of the Austrian national state.” It bound Germany not to interfere in Austria’s internal political affairs. In return, the preamble obligated Schussnigg “with respect to the German Reich, to maintain a basic position that conforms to the fact that Austria sees herself as a German state."[50] The document required that “all decisive elements for shaping public opinion in both countries shall serve the purpose of developing mutual relations which are once again normal and friendly.” [51]

The agreement offered general guidelines for promoting commerce, such as lifting restrictions on travel and trade across the frontier. Schussnigg agreed to allow members of the "national opposition" to participate in government. He released 15,583 political prisoners. Many were National Socialists whom Hitler arranged to resettle in Germany. Upon the Führer's insistence, Schussnigg relaxed restrictions on the press. An important element of the agreement stipulated, "Both governments will exchange views in foreign policy matters that affect both countries."[52]

Papen and Schussnigg signed the agreement in Vienna on July 11, 1936. Germany's assurance to respect Austrian independence drew praise from the international press, even in France. Hitler summoned Josef Leopold, leader of the Austrian National Socialists, and instructed him to take the new treaty "very seriously." The Führer warned Leopold that he wanted no encore of the 1934 coup: "The Austrian National Socialists must maintain exemplary discipline and regard unification as an internal German matter, a solution to which can only be found within the scope of negotiations between Berlin and Vienna."[53] Hitler was hopeful, thanks in part to Schussnigg's encouraging remark that Austrian-German unification was "an attainable political objective for the future."

The *Bundeskanzler*, however, had no interest in honoring the compact. He openly criticized Hitler for allegedly misinterpreting the mission of the Reich: "With his assertion that the unity of the Reich is based on the harmony of the race and the language of the people living within it, Hitler has falsified and betrayed the spirit of the Reich. The Reich is not determined by race and is not heathenish; it is Christian and universal."[54] Schussnigg publicly described Austria as "the last bulwark of civilization in central Europe," a studied insult to his ethnic neighbor to the north. During 1937, Schussnigg entreated the British government to guarantee Austrian sovereignty. This clandestine diplomatic maneuver, as well as the unfriendly public statements regarding Germany, directly violated the agreement signed in July.[55]

Europe was in the age of nationalism; the average Austrian rejected Schussnigg's liberal perception of Austria as a universal realm transcending ethnic roots and customs. While the country wallowed in the

throe of economic depression, commerce in the Reich flourished. Unification with Germany promised employment and prosperity. Schussnigg was himself a dictator; he could not argue that incorporating his country into the German authoritarian state would cost Austrians their liberties. England and France showed no interest in guaranteeing a country that flouted democratic principles. In an atmosphere of internal unrest and diplomatic isolation, the *Bundeskanzler* turned again to Germany.

Hitler invited Schussnigg to meet at the *Berghof* on February 12, 1938. The Führer hoped to get Austrian-German relations back on track toward unification as an evolutionary process. A member of Austria's "national opposition," Arthur Seyss-Inquart, prepared a list of proposals for Schussnigg as a basis for negotiations in Berchtesgaden. These included bringing political opponents into the government. Informed of the proposals, Hitler prepared his own list.

The ten German proposals, among others, called for joint consultation in foreign policy matters mutually affecting Austria and Germany, amnesty for political prisoners, pensions for dismissed civil servants, and legalization of the National Socialist party in Austria. They demanded freedom of the press and preparations to merge the two countries' economic systems. This last would be particularly beneficial to the Austrian population. The list recommended several names - none of them hard-line National Socialists -for cabinet posts, including Seyss-Inquart.[56] Point eight proposed a military officers exchange program, joint general staff conferences, promoting camaraderie, and sharing knowledge in weapons development.

Schussnigg attended the Berchtesgaden session with his military adjutant, Lieutenant-Colonel Bartl, and Guido Schmidt. During the initial private session between the two heads of state, Schussnigg became defensive and asserted that it was he, not Hitler, who represented Austria. Hitler, born an Austrian, retorted, "Just once, try holding a free election in Austria, with you and I opposing each other as candidates. Then we'll see."[57]

During parallel talks between Guido Schmidt and Germany's newly appointed foreign minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Austrian

government won significant concessions. It reduced the obligation to joint consultation on foreign policy matters to “an exchange of thoughts.” It limited the political activity of National Socialists in Austria. Hitler agreed to publicly condemn illegal acts, such as sabotage, of his followers there. The Führer approved Vienna’s request that aggressive National Socialists be relocated to Germany. The Germans withdrew those candidates suggested for Austrian cabinet posts that Schussnigg objected to. Berlin abandoned its plan for a joint economic system and reduced the scope of military cooperation. At the conclusion of the conference, Hitler told Schussnigg, “This is the best way. The Austrian question is regulated for the next five years."[58]

Newspapers in England, France, and the USA claimed that Hitler presented his demands as an ultimatum, intimidated Schussnigg by inviting three German generals to the conference, and threatened invasion if the *Bundeskanzler* failed to sign. The fact that the Austrians negotiated significant modifications demonstrates that Germany’s proposals were not an ultimatum. The generals attended to provide consultation on questions of integrating the two countries' armed forces. Schussnigg brought along his own military advisor. Guido Schmidt testified later that he had no recollection of a German threat to invade Austria.[59]

Papen stated that it was his impression that Schussnigg enjoyed full freedom of decision throughout the sessions. The *Bundeskanzler* confessed that he had been under considerable mental stress but nothing more. The British ambassador to Austria, Sir Charles Palairet, reported to London on a number of initial demands which Hitler withdrew. He confirmed that Schmidt told him nothing of German threats. Palairet cited “Herr Hitler’s desire to achieve his aims in regard to Austria by evolutionary means."[60]

Schussnigg appointed Hitler’s choice, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, interior minister and national police chief on February 15. The next day in Berlin, Seyss-Inquart told Hitler of his intention to operate “strictly on the basis of a self-sufficient and independent Austria” and “within the framework of the constitution."[61] Hitler accepted this. Addressing the German parliament on February 20, the Führer thanked Schussnigg for his “understanding and kindness.” He predicted that “friendly cooperation between the two countries in every field has been assured.” The

following day, he received Austria's underground National Socialist leader, Josef Leopold. Calling his activities "insane," he brusquely ordered Leopold and his four chief lieutenants to pack up and move to Germany.[62]

Hitler believed that the compact insured a period of harmony that would gradually bring Austria into the German realm through democratic means. Schussnigg did not share this belief. Theodor Hornbostel, chief of the Austrian State Chancery, told the British ambassador that month, that the loosely defined guidelines of the agreement with Hitler would be easy to circumvent. Hornbostel confided that his government "really doesn't want to put them into practice."[63]

Stability in Austria however, deteriorated. The international stock exchange, with its usual nose for ominous developments, experienced a sudden flight from the Austrian shilling. Austrian government bonds plummeted in value, especially in London and Zurich. National Socialist sympathizers in the Fatherland Front and in the Austrian youth organizations steadily transformed the political disposition of these groups. Spontaneous mass demonstrations by National Socialists enjoyed popular support. Graz, for all practical purposes, came under their control. In many areas, Schussnigg's followers scarcely risked appearing in public.

Displaying his customary lack of political finesse, Schussnigg took a desperate step to rescue his career. In Innsbruck on March 9, he announced a national plebiscite to take place in four days' time. The purpose was to give voters the opportunity to affirm their confidence in the government and preference for Austrian independence. Such a poll could only accentuate the division between German and Austrian. It transgressed against the spirit of the evolutionary process of assimilating the two cultures, a process Schussnigg had accepted by signing the agreement with Germany.



Kurt Schussnigg, Austria's unpopular dictator, announces a national plebiscite in a last-ditch bid to preserve Austrian independence in 1938.

Since no elections had taken place since 1932, there were no current lists of registered voters. There was insufficient time to prepare new rosters. Only citizens above 25 years of age were eligible. This prevented young adults, a disproportionately large percentage of whom backed National Socialism, from participating. The general secretary of the Fatherland Front, Guido Zernatto, prepared guidelines that allowed only members of the reigning political party to staff the balloting stations. The ballot cards had the word "yes" printed on one side but were blank on the other. This required people voting "no" to write the word in the same size characters on the back of the card. Polling station personnel, all members of the Fatherland Front, would therefore be able to identify dissenters. During preparations for the election, the government press announced that anyone voting "no" would be guilty of treason.[64]

Publication of these details evoked protests from the "national opposition." Fearing German intervention, Schussnigg appealed to France and Britain for assistance. In the midst of another cabinet crisis, France could not respond. The British recognized the plebiscite as a flagrant challenge to Hitler. Chamberlain called the plebiscite a "blunder." Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax considered Schussnigg's maneuver "foolish and provocative."[65] He blandly informed the Austrian dictator that England could offer neither advice nor protection. Halifax could not help adding

that Schussnigg failed to seek Britain’s counsel before announcing the plebiscite, “which has caused so much trouble."[66]

Hitler was aghast that Schussnigg violated their agreement only weeks after signing. At first he simply refused to believe the news; however, once he did, his reaction was temperate. He flew his diplomatic trouble-shooter, Wilhelm Keppler, to Vienna. Keppler’s instructions were to either prevent the plebiscite “without military threats” or at least arrange for it to include the opportunity to vote for Anschluss, or unification, with Germany.[67] Seyss-Inquart and General Edmund von Glase-Horstenau, minority representative in the Austrian cabinet, confronted Schussnigg. They pointed out that the entire balloting process drawn up by the Fatherland Front violated the constitution. They demanded a postponement, allowing time to prepare a plebiscite in which all parties would be fairly represented.

The dictator summoned Defense Secretary General Zehner, security chief Colonel Skubl, and Lieutenant-Marshal Hülgerth of the Fatherland Front militia. He asked whether armed resistance against a German invasion was feasible. The Austrian army, reduced to 30,000 men by the 1919 treaty, was not mobilized. Skubl dismissed the police force as too saturated with National Socialists to be reliable. Only the militia, Hülgerth assured the *Bundeskanzler*, was prepared. Recognizing this force as insufficient, Schussnigg attempted without success to telephone Mussolini to solicit military aid.[68] Out of options, he resigned as chancellor. This terminated the era of a politician who entreated Austria’s wartime enemies France, Britain, and Italy, and called upon his own followers as well, to transform his country into a battleground in a war against his German brethren and former comrades-in-arms of the World War.

Schussnigg’s entire cabinet withdrew, and Austria was, practically speaking, without a government. Throughout the land, members of Austria’s SA and its smaller, elite cousin, the SS, began assuming administrative functions. The following day, March 12, 1938, German troops crossed into Austria. Schussnigg ordered the Austrian army not to resist.

Hitler’s decision to militarily occupy Austria was neither premeditated

nor desired by him. He had hoped to maintain a semblance of legality in assimilating Austria. With Seyss-Inquart as *Bundeskanzler* and a new cabinet, the two governments could have coordinated the transition smoothly via the evolutionary process. In fact, the German army general staff had no operational plan for an invasion of Austria in place; the entire maneuver was impromptu. The Führer was aware of the bad publicity abroad such an apparent act of force would generate; however, he feared that Austrian Marxists might capitalize on the country's momentary political vacuum and stage an uprising. Göring warned of the possibility that the Alpine republic's neighbors might also exploit its temporary weakness. Italy could occupy eastern Tirol, Yugoslavia the Kärnten province, or Hungary the Burgenland. Yugoslavia had already annexed part of Kärnten in 1919 during Austria's post-war impotence.[69]

Described as aggression by the foreign press, the German army's advance made a welcome impression inside Austria. A sergeant in the SS Signals Battalion related his experience while sent with a comrade ahead of the column to reconnoiter the route to Vienna. Two days under way, the pair stopped at an inn. As the soldiers entered, "Almost everyone present rose and greeted us with shouts of 'Heil! '... We were pressed to a table, the waiters rushed over with coffee and pastries, and we kept shaking hands with people, answering questions and expressing our gratitude for all the attention.... It was harder to leave the inn. The guests stood up, clapped, wished us well and stuffed cigarettes in our pockets."[70]

Another member of the battalion gave this account: "The closer the column approached Vienna, the greater was the rejoicing of the people lining the roads. Often with tears in their eyes, they gave full expression to their joy, shook hands with the soldiers in the vehicles and tossed flowers and packs of cigarettes to them. Everyone seemed seized with frenzy."[71] Throughout the military occupation of Austria, largely symbolic in nature, not a single shot was fired nor was one person injured.

Hitler scheduled joint plebiscites in Austria and Germany for April 10, 1938. Both populations decided on whether to incorporate the two countries into a single state. The people of Austria cast 99.73 percent of their ballots in favor of Anschluss with Germany. The Germans voted 99.08 percent for unification. As testimony to how distant Schussnigg had been to the heartbeat of his nation, he had personally estimated in early March

that 70 percent of the Austrian populace supported his regime's policy of independence.[72]

On March 18, 1938, the German government notified the League of Nations that Austria had cancelled its affiliation. This international body, which had never manifest concern for the plight of the distressed little nation, now debated whether Germany was responsible for paying Austria's delinquent membership dues of 50,000 Swiss francs from January 1 to March 13.[73] This ended the chain of circumstances leading to the unification of Hitler's homeland with the German Reich, an event known to history as "the rape of Austria."

Czechoslovakia

A few months after the Anschluss, Germany annexed the Sudetenland, the ethnic German territory lining the periphery of western Czechoslovakia. The transfer of the region to German control provoked a serious war scare. The controversy traced its origin to the 1919 Versailles system.

During World War I, Czechs served in the Austro-Hungarian army. Immigrants in London and Paris established the Czech Committee on November 14, 1915. Two Czechs in exile, Tomas Masaryk and Eduard Benes, won the Entente's endorsement for a future Czechoslovak state to be carved from portions of the Hapsburg realm. On October 18, 1918, Czechs in Paris and in the USA claimed Czechoslovakian independence.

The new country had three components. Furthest east was Ruthenia, the population of which voluntarily joined Czechoslovakia. In the center was Slovakia, and many Slovaks wanted independence or at least considerable autonomy. The western part consisted of Bohemia and Moravia, where three million German Austrians dwelled with the Czechs. These Germans wished to remain with Austria.

Masaryk and Benes enjoyed prevailing influence in fashioning the post-war structure of Czechoslovakia. Masaryk persuaded Wilson to alter his 14 points, which promised each nationality of Austria-Hungary the opportunity for autonomous development, to exclude Germans. Benes consciously underestimated the number of Sudeten Germans by nearly a

million. He falsely claimed that they were not a unified minority, but lived in settlements integrated with Czechs. “The Germans in Bohemia are only colonists,” he asserted.[74]

Rich in raw materials and industry, the border territory offered Czechoslovakia a topographical defensive barrier against Germany. Benes based his deliberations more on economic and strategic advantages than on the natural rights of the population. The 1910 census offered a comparison of the number of German “colonists” wishing to remain with Austria in the affected areas to Czechs residing there. In Bohemia lived 2,070,438 Germans to 116,275 Czechs; in the Sudetenland 643,804 Germans to 25,028 Czechs; in the Bohemian Forest 176,237 Germans to 6,131 Czechs; in southern Moravia 180,449 Germans compared to 12,477 Czechs.[75]

Since the Paris peace conference continued until mid-1919, the German provinces were technically still part of Austria when the Austrian republic held its first democratic election that February 16. The Sudeten Germans prepared ballots to participate. The Czech army forcibly disrupted the arrangements. On March 4, thousands of Sudeten Germans organized peaceful demonstrations in their towns and villages to protest. Czech soldiers fired into the unarmed crowds, killing 54 Germans, 20 of them women.[76]

The Allies finalized a compact with Czechoslovakia formally recognizing her statehood. The preamble to the document endorsed the arrangement, “in consideration that the peoples of Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia, as well as the people of Slovakia have decided of their own free will to join into a lasting union.” Benes promised the Allies “to give the Germans all rights they are entitled to. . . . It will all in all be a very liberal regime."[77]

Denigrating the ethnic German population to “immigrant” status, the Czech government instituted a policy of “rapid de-Germanizing” in Bohemia and in the Sudetenland. Prague transferred military garrisons, railroad personnel, civil servants, prison populations and even hospital patients in large numbers there to manipulate the census figures. Czech officials tallied Czech transients as residents, even though “residency” seldom extended beyond two days. In Trautenau in northern Bohemia, a

600-man Czech infantry battalion spent one winter day in an unfinished barracks to be counted in the survey. The resulting statistics deprived German districts of adequate representation in parliament. Prague occasionally employed less subtle means to maintain its minorities' political impotence. At an election rally of the Sudeten German Party in Teplitz-Schönau in 1937, the key speaker, Karl Frank, criticized Benes. Czech police scattered the assembly. Fifty-three Germans died in the melee and hundreds suffered injuries.[78]

Prague authorities closed smaller German schools throughout the Sudetenland. They replaced them with Czech language institutions, often requiring German youngsters to attend. The government closed nine of Bohemia’s 19 German universities. Only 4.7 percent of state financial assistance went to German college students, although ethnic Germans comprised nearly a fourth of Czechoslovakia’s population. The government issued all public forms and applications in Czech language, even in the Sudetenland. Half the German municipal and rural officials lost their jobs, 41 percent of German postmen and 48.5 percent of railroad personnel.[79]

The Czechoslovakian government’s Land Reform Act redistributed real estate so that every rural family would receive sufficient acreage to subsist from the soil. The head of the program, Karel Viskovsky, defined the results as follows: “The soil is passing from the hands of the foreigners into the hands of the Czech people."[80] Most went to Czech legionnaires and their families. Viskovsky auctioned off the balance to affluent Czechs and Slovaks. They purchased the properties below market value, allowing the former owners to return as tenant farmers. The Germans in Bohemia and Moravia lost 25 percent of their land to Czechs through the state-sponsored land reform.

Approximately one third of the Sudetenland consisted of woodlands, of which the state took over administration. The authorities dismissed some 40,000 German forestry workers, replacing them with Czechs. By 1931, the number of ethnic German tradesmen out of work was three times that of Czechs. Relief efforts concentrated on areas with predominantly Czech populations. A study by the British Foreign Office in 1936 estimated that Czechoslovakia’s German colony - approximately 22 percent of the population - comprised 60 percent of the unemployed.[81] Among the most

economically distressed areas was Reichenberg, once home to a thriving glass and textile industry. Between 1922 and 1936, 153 factories there closed. Prague awarded contracts for construction and other public works projects for Reichenberg to foreign companies who brought in their own labor.[82]

Benes described his people as "mortal enemies of the Germans."[83] In May 1919, during the inauguration ceremony in Piisen for President Tomas Masaryk, Czechs broke into an apartment not displaying a flag in the window for the occasion. The resident, a German widow and mother of four, was bedridden from illness. The intruders dragged her down the staircase feet first and into the street, her head bouncing off the steps during the descent. She died from her injuries.[84]

In 1921, Masaryk deployed Czech troops in German settlements without provocation. In Grasslitz, four miles from the frontier with Germany, protestors clashed with entering Czech military personnel. The soldiers shot 15 Bohemian Germans dead. Under the "Law to Protect the Republic," Czech authorities arrested Sudeten Germans demanding self-determination as traitors or spies. They jailed for espionage tourists from Germany visiting Czechoslovakia for sports competitions or for ethnic festivals. Between 1923 and 1932, the state conducted 8,972 legal proceedings against dissident members of ethnic minorities. Defendants in sedition trials often included Sudeten Germans belonging to sports leagues, youth groups, singing societies, or backpacking clubs.[85]

Prague established an immense "border zone" in which lived 85 percent of all Sudeten Germans, the entire Polish and Ruthenian populations, and 95 percent of the Hungarian colony. It came under permanent martial law. The army supervised the administration of factories, major construction projects, public works, the telephone service and forestry. Military authorities limited the civil liberties of citizens in the "border zone," which comprised 56 percent of the entire country. This did not prevent Benes from lauding Czechoslovakia as a "lighthouse of democracy."[86]



Czech soldiers occupy an ethnic German community to enforce martial law in the country's expansive "border zone."

Although during the first years of Hitler's chancellorship, few among the German public were concerned with Czechoslovakia, for Hitler himself, the fate of the Sudetenland symbolized the tragedy of Germans under foreign rule. The Sudeten people waged a dogged, solitary struggle to maintain their German identity. Hitler made it his personal mission to recover the Sudetenland. He introduced the topic during the Reichstag speech on February 20, 1938: "As long as Germany was herself weak and defenseless, she had to simply accept the continuous persecution of German people along our borders. . . . The interests of the German Reich also include the protection of those fellow Germans who are unable on their own, on our very frontier, to insure their right to basic human, political and ideological freedoms."[87]

Another circumstance turned Hitler's attention to Czechoslovakia. Geographically, the country resembled a spear point penetrating deeply into Reich's territory. This constituted a potential national security threat no responsible leader could ignore. In January 1924, Paris and Prague concluded a "friendship pact" containing a military clause. This envisioned mutual general staff talks to prepare a joint defensive strategy in case of attack by a common enemy. The signatories followed with a formal military treaty in October 1925.

Benes replaced the 85-year old Masaryk as president of the republic in December 1935. Only months before becoming president, Benes as foreign minister had concluded a military alliance with the Soviet Union. The pact provided for significant Czech-Russian cooperation. By the beginning of 1936, the Czechs had completed 32 air fields sited near the German frontier as bases for the rapidly expanding Red Air Force.[88] They established depots to stockpile aviation fuel, aerial bombs and other war materiel.

The Red Army stationed troops in Bohemia and Moravia to undergo parachute training for a possible airborne assault against Germany.[89] It transferred officers to the Czechoslovakian War Ministry in Prague and to local command centers. On February 12, 1937, the London *Daily Mail* reported that immediately after ratification of the Prague-Moscow pact, Russian flight officers inspected Czech air bases and fuel dumps for their air force.[90]



Czech and Red Army officers inspect Czechoslovakian defenses together during 1938. Prague allowed the Soviets to train troops in Czechoslovakia, unsettling the Germans.

Prague was a converging point for Communist immigrants who had fled Germany in 1933 and Austria after the Anschluss. Sir Orme Sargent of the British Foreign Office called Czechoslovakia a “distribution center” for

Stalin's Comintern propaganda against Germany.[91] With France, Czechoslovakia and the USSR connected by military alliances since 1936, the Führer felt boxed in. When he re-garrisoned the Rhineland on March 7 of that year, Benes offered France the support of the Czechoslovakian army for a joint invasion of Germany. During the months to follow, it swelled to a force of 1,453,000 men.[92]

The Germans were undecided on how to recover the Sudetenland. In 1938, the British ambassador in Prague, Sir Basil Newton, advised the Foreign Office, "How precisely they will proceed it is impossible to prophesy, but the indications are that they will at first seek to achieve their aims by friendly diplomacy rather than by physical or economic terrorism."[93] On May 6, British newspaper magnate Lord Harold Rothermere praised the Germans as "very patient people" in an editorial in the *Daily Mail*[94]

The Austrian Anschluss encouraged the Sudeten German Party, the SdP. Under the leadership of its founder, Konrad Henlein, it had already won 44 seats in the Czechoslovakian chamber of deputies and 23 in the senate in the May 1935 elections. At an SdP assembly in Carlsbad on April 25, 1938, Heinlein demanded autonomy for the ethnic German region. With 90 percent of Sudeten voters behind him, he had sufficient influence to compel the Czechs to enter negotiations.

Henlein and Karl Frank had met with Hitler on March 28, but were unable to persuade the Führer to pressure the Czechs. Ribbentrop told the two guests that it was not Germany's task "to offer individual suggestions as to what demands should be made of the Czechoslovakian government." Berlin instructed the German embassy in Prague to limit support of the SdP to private talks with Czechoslovakian statesmen, "if the occasion presents itself."[95] The allegation of post-war historians that at the meeting, Hitler ordered Henlein to impose impossible terms in order to provoke the Czechs, is without substance.

The British government monitored the escalating controversy. "The plain fact is that the Sudetendeutsche are being oppressed by the Czechs," noted Vansittart.[96] Newton sent London a detailed analysis from Prague on March 15. He predicted that as long as they can reckon with

Anglo-French support in the event of an armed clash with Germany, the Czechs will pursue their present policy. The Germans cannot be deterred from aggression if they consider it necessary. If Paris and London encourage Prague to resist compromise, war is inevitable.

England and France, Newton continued, cannot prevent Czechoslovakia from being overrun. At most they can wage war to restore a status quo that is already proving unworkable. He concluded that no German government will accept “a hostile Czechoslovakia in their flank.” Having read Newton’s report, the British ambassador in Berlin, Henderson, cabled his ministry on May 17, “I share unreservedly and in all respects views expressed by Mr. Newton in his telegram."[97]

The Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy discussed Newton’s analysis the following day. As its minutes record, “The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence said that he had been struck by Mr. Newton’s view that Czechoslovakia’s present political position was not permanently tenable and that she was in fact an unstable unit in Central Europe. If, as he believed, this truly represented the position he could see no reason why we should take any steps to maintain such a unit in being."[98]

On March 21, the chiefs of staff submitted a report to the committee explaining that the British and French armies were too weak to go to war against Germany, Italy, and Japan in an expanding conflict over Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain and Halifax considered the military assessment “an extremely melancholy document.” Halifax summarized on April 27, “Neither we nor France were equipped for a war with Germany."[99]

France’s new prime minister, Eduard Daladier, visited London on April 28 to persuade Chamberlain to publicly guarantee English protection for Czechoslovakia. His British colleague retorted that Benes has never treated the German minority in the territories he annexed in a liberal manner as promised. Chamberlain declared that the people of England would never begin a war to prevent the nationalities of central Europe from expressing their will in a plebiscite.

That month, Hitler ordered General Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the Armed Forces Supreme Command (OKW), to prepare a study on the possible

invasion of Czechoslovakia. He told Keitel that he did not at present intend to invade.[100] Guidelines Hitler furnished the OKW emphasized that he would reject any scenario proposing a “strategic surprise attack out of the clear sky without grounds or possibility of justification.” The Führer described “an untenable situation for us should the major confrontation in the East. . . with Bolshevism ever come.... Czechoslovakia would then be the springboard for the Red Army and a landing place for its air force."[101]

On May 20, Benes called up over 150,000 military reservists to active duty, claiming that the measure was necessary because of a secret mobilization of the German armed forces. The Czech war office charged that eight to ten German divisions were marching toward the common frontier. The French military attaché in Berlin cabled his government that he saw no evidence of larger troop movements. Henderson sent two British army officers on his Berlin embassy staff on an extensive reconnaissance through the German border provinces of Saxony and Silesia. He wrote later, “They could discover no sign of unusual or significant Germany military activity, nor indeed could any of the military attachés of other foreign missions in Berlin, who were similarly engaged in scouring the country."[102]

Hitler more or less ignored Benes' provocation and took no action, military or otherwise. Journalists in Paris, Prague, London, and New York accepted Benes' spurious allegations about German troop deployments. They published stories about how the Führer had massed his divisions to bluff the Czechs into submitting to his demands. When Benes defiantly countered with his own partial mobilization, Hitler supposedly “backed down” and recalled his formations, a profound humiliation for a dictator who was “incapable of acting on his own threats."[103] His declarations regarding the Sudetenland were “nothing but hot air.”

Halifax warned Herbert von Dirksen, the German ambassador in London, that a Czech-German war would bring France and Britain into the conflict against the Reich. The foreign secretary then composed a personal letter to Ribbentrop admonishing him of the hazards any “rash actions” would lead to for European civilization.[104] Henderson recorded, “What Hitler could not stomach was the exultation of the press. . . . Every newspaper in Europe and America joined in the chorus. 'No' had been said, and Hitler

had been forced to yield. The democratic powers had brought the totalitarian states to heel, etc."[105] The British conducted partial mobilization of their fleet and the French garrisoned their fortifications along the German border, even though both knew that their Czech ally had instigated the crisis. For Hitler, threats and accusations of cowardice were his reward for the forbearance he had exercised.

The May crisis impressed Hitler with how hostile the western democracies and Czechoslovakia were toward Germany. Even the USSR had publicly reaffirmed its military obligation to the Czechs. He concluded that a peaceful settlement of the Sudeten issue was unlikely. On May 30, he revised the earlier armed forces directive addressing potential war with the Czechs to begin with the sentence, “It is my unalterable resolve to smash Czechoslovakia through a military action in the foreseeable future.” The document stressed that “preparations are to be implemented without delay."[106]



After the May crisis, Hitler ordered the construction of fortifications to defend the border with France. Inspecting the *Westwall* are (left to right) Erhard Milch, Heinrich Himmler, Wilhelm Keitel, Himmler's adjutant Karl Wolff and the Führer. (Bundesarchiv)

Historians present this statement as proof of Hitler’s warlike intentions. Yet just 18 days later, he revised the classified directive, deleting the sentence about the resolve to smash the Czechs. He stated instead that

the “solution of the Czech question” was “the near-term objective.” There is little evidence here of a clear intent to wage war. Henderson wrote Halifax, “It stands to reason that Hitler himself must equally be prepared for all eventualities. But from there to say that he has already decided on aggressive action against Czechoslovakia this autumn is, I think, untrue."[107] The British ambassador wrote again in August, “But I do not believe he wants war.” In his own memoirs, Henderson later reflected on the May crisis: “When we were thinking only that Germany was on the point of attacking the Czechs, the Germans were apprehensive lest the latter meant to provoke a European war before they themselves were ready for it."[108]

Hitler still possessed a *diplomatic* trump; democracy’s own arguments about human rights. The Führer publicly stated, “What the Germans insist on is the right to self-determination that every other nation also possesses. ... I demand that the oppression of the three-and-a-half million Germans in Czechoslovakia stop, and that in its place the free right to self-determination step in."[109] This was the Achilles heel of his adversaries. Henderson confessed, “On the broadest moral grounds it was thus difficult to justify offhand the refusal of the right to self-determination to the 2,750,000 Sudetens living in solid blocks just across Germany’s border. Its flat denial would have been contrary to a principle on which the British Empire itself was founded, and would consequently never have rallied to us the wholehearted support either of the British People or of that Empire."[110] The permanent undersecretary for the Foreign Office, Alexander Cadogan, concluded that the Sudeten problem “was not an issue on which we should be on very strong ground for plunging Europe into war."[111]

Chamberlain assessed England’s position: His country had not yet sufficiently rearmed to honor the commitment to support France in the event of war. To allow Hitler a free hand to settle accounts with Benes would have marred British esteem abroad; “We shall be despised forever,” ventured Halifax’s secretary, Sir Oliver Harvey.[112] A plebiscite for the Sudetenland also had pitfalls. Prague opposed the idea because the precedent would encourage the Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, and Ruthenians to demand one as well. Since these minorities suffered under-representation in government and from oppression, the result would likely

dissolve Czechoslovakia.

Daladier proposed a compromise: Czechoslovakia would cede the Sudetenland to Germany without conducting a plebiscite. In this way, the Czech state would remain reasonably intact. Its importance to France, as Daladier explained to Chamberlain, was that “in any military operation there are wonderful possibilities for attacking Germany from Czechoslovak territory."[113] French Aviation Minister Pierre Cot echoed this attitude with a remark quoted in London’s *News Chronicle* of July 1, 1938. Cot stated that France and England needed Czechoslovakia, “because from this state the German economy and the German industry are most easily to be destroyed with bombs. . . . Joint attacks of the French and Czech air forces can very quickly destroy all German production facilities."[114]

In August, Chamberlain proposed travelling to Germany to meet with Hitler to settle the Sudeten question together. He elicited a promise from his host that Germany would take no military action during the negotiations. Czech Foreign Minister Kamil Krofta told the British and French governments that his country refused to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. London countered bluntly, “The Franco-British plan is the only means of preventing the threat of a German attack,” and that if Prague rejects it, England and France will not intervene if Germany invades Czechoslovakia. [115] On September 21, Benes unconditionally acquiesced to the proposal.

During September, Chamberlain visited Germany three times. The first meeting with Hitler took place in Berchtesgaden on September 15. The session was cordial and constructive. Chamberlain approved Hitler’s proposals for the Sudeten areas to be annexed. Halifax wrote his ambassadors, “In fact it corresponded very closely to the line we have been examining."[116] Chamberlain spent the following week in meetings with Daladier and the Czechs to obtain their consent. In Berlin, the German monitoring station in the Reich’s Ministry of Aviation eavesdropped on a telephone conversation between Benes and French Colonial Minister Georges Mandel. Undermining Daladier, Mandel told Benes, “Paris and London have no right to dictate your attitude to you. If your territory is violated, you should not wait a second to issue orders to your army to defend the homeland. . . . If you fire the first shot in self-

defense... the cannons of France, Great Britain and also Soviet Russia will begin firing on their own."[117] The Germans also intercepted communications between Prague and its London and Paris embassies. The Benes government had instructed them to stall for time until the "war parties" in England and in France topple Chamberlain and Daladier.

On September 22, Hitler conferred with Chamberlain at the Hotel Dreesen in Bad Godesberg. Reports of mounting unrest in the Sudetenland clouded the atmosphere. Henlein had formed an ethnic German militia, numbering nearly 40,000 men, which skirmished with Czech soldiers and police.[118] The Czech government correspondingly implemented more repressive measures. In 14 days, 120,000 Sudeten Germans crossed into the Reich to escape the violence. Henlein appealed to Hitler to send in the German army, "to put an end to any more murders resulting from Czech fanaticism."[119]

At Bad Godesberg, the Führer demanded the right to militarily occupy the territory to be annexed in four days. He cited mounting turmoil there as justification. Chamberlain was taken aback. Bitter haggling followed. The tension pervaded the next night's conference, until an orderly interrupted with news that Benes had just declared general mobilization. Another 1.2 million Czech reservists were returning to active duty. Hitler thereupon reassured his English guest that he would keep his promise to withhold any military response, "despite this unheard-of provocation."[120] This relaxed the atmosphere and the discussion assumed a friendlier tone.

In the days following the conference, Chamberlain negotiated with the Czechs. British and French diplomats ultimately prevailed upon Hitler to relax his additional demands. Göring showed Henderson transcripts of the telephone dialogs between Benes and Jan Masaryk illuminating the Czech intrigues. Neither the British nor the French doubted their authenticity.[121] At Munich on September 28, Chamberlain, Hitler, Daladier, and Mussolini finalized details of the annexation of the Sudetenland which Prague had agreed to on the 21st.

Angry with Chamberlain, Jan Masaryk could only bluster, "What bad luck that this stupid, badly informed person is the English prime minister."[122] French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet praised Hitler for softening his

Godesberg terms. The Führer also reaped an accolade in the London *Times* on October 2 for his concessions and for reducing military measures to “solely a symbolic partial occupation."[123] Choosing exile in London, Benes later told an associate, “We needed a war and I did everything to bring the war on."[124]

Once Benes was gone, Germany attempted to improve relations with Prague. There remained 378,000 ethnic Germans in portions of Bohemia-Moravia not annexed by the Reich. Hitler ordered on October 3 that this minority, while nurturing its cultural heritage, was to relinquish political activity toward autonomy or returning its lands to German sovereignty. He met with the new Czech foreign minister, Frantisek Chvalkovsky, on the 14th. Hitler urged him to help “normalize relations in a friendly way."[125]

In November, the legal department of the German Foreign Office submitted a draft for a Czech-German friendship treaty. Though Hitler postponed the matter until January 1939, the initiative indicates his interest in working with Prague. His first gesture to the new regime was a generous policy toward Czech residents of the annexed Sudetenland. There were 743,000 of them who initially came under German dominion. 260,000 Czech soldiers, civil servants and their families returned to Czech territory under orders from their government. Another 160,000 not wishing to live under German jurisdiction migrated voluntarily.



Young well-wishers greet Hitler during his tour of the Sudetenland in October 1938.

A treaty the two states ratified on November 20 permitted Czechs and Slovaks remaining in the Sudetenland to choose their citizenship. Men at least 28 years of age, together with their wives and children, received German citizenship upon request. The Reich's Government allowed people opting to remain Czechoslovak nationals to stay on as guest residents. People leaving the Sudeten territory retained ownership of private property there with the option to sell or rent it. Under the treaty's provisions, the German and Czech governments respectively could expel foreigners considered a political risk. Out of the more than 300,000 Czechs choosing to continue to live in the Sudetenland, the Germans deported just 140 "undesirable persons." Hitler exempted Czechs and Slovaks absorbed into the Reich from service in its armed forces.[126]

The ethnic German minority residing in Prague-controlled sections of Bohemia-Moravia experienced the resentment of the Czechs after their defeat at Munich. Thousands of Germans lost their jobs. Many were unnecessarily watched by the police. The government denied them and their families unemployment benefits. Czech health insurance companies refused claims for the German university clinic in Prague. Hitler confronted Chvalkovsky on January 21, 1939, with a list of grievances resulting from what he called a lingering "Benes mentality" throughout

the republic. Citing the hostile tone of the Czech press, the Führer warned that no Great Power can tolerate a smaller neighboring country representing a perpetual threat in its flank. He stressed once more the necessity of improving relations.[127]

Ribbentrop read Chvalkovsky passages from prominent Czech newspapers. One predicted, "Four months after Munich it is already clear that a war is unavoidable." Another read, "The momentary political situation will not be regarded as unchangeable and a permanent circumstance."[128] Henderson advised Voytech Mastny, the Czech ambassador in Berlin, to urge his government to avoid abuse of its ethnic German residents. In exile in London, Benes sought to maintain political influence through his contacts in Prague. His followers there conducted a press campaign criticizing the present regime for compliance toward Berlin.[129]

None of the rivalries in this political constellation would matter long. The Munich Accord, engineered by the western democracies to save Czechoslovakia, was ironically her death sentence. Its precedent for self-determination encouraged the country's other captive minorities to follow the example of the Sudeten Germans. Most prominent among them were the Slovaks. The Czech army and militia had occupied their land in 1919. Tomas Masaryk failed to deliver on his promise of regional autonomy. Nor were Slovaks equally represented in public administration; of 8,000 civil servants in Prague's government offices, just 200 were Slovak.[130]

Hitler wished to remain neutral in the friction dividing Czechs and Slovaks. On November 19, the Reich's Foreign Office directed its mission in Prague to watch events with reserve. The German press received instructions to maintain a non-partisan attitude in reporting on tensions in Slovakia. Hitler ordered, "For the time being, no political talks with the Slovaks are opportune."[131]

Prague lost its grip on the disaffected minorities. In October, the Slovaks and Ruthenians established regional parliaments; a right finally conceded by the central government as a step toward autonomy. Delegates used their influence and authority to steer the regions more toward independence. The new Czech president, Dr. Emil Hacha, resorted to the usual hammer methods. On March 6, he deployed troops in the Carpato-

Ukraine and appointed General Lev Prchala, their commander, minister of the interior and finance. In Slovakia, Hacha dissolved the regional parliament. He placed the capital, Pressburg, under martial law and jailed 60 Slovakian politicians. Czech soldiers and police transferred to Pressburg. Hacha faced mounting chaos and the threat of open rebellion. He appealed to Dr. Joseph Tiso, whom the Slovaks had elected their prime minister, to help restore order.

On March 13, Tiso visited Berlin to ask Hitler how he would react to a Slovakian declaration of independence. The Führer replied only that he has no interest in occupying Slovakia, since the land had never belonged to the German Reich. Tiso returned to Pressburg. He proclaimed national independence in parliament the next day. Fearing that the Hungarian army would invade and annex Slovakia, Tiso asked for German protection. Hitler replied, “I acknowledge the receipt of your telegram and hereby assume the security of the Slovakian state.” On this day, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as a republic. The German chancellor pacified the Hungarians by allowing them to occupy the Carpato-Ukraine.

Hacha requested an audience with Hitler. He and Chvalkovsky arrived in Berlin by train the night of the 14th. Since taking office, both men had worked to improve relations with Germany. The machinations of Benes’s remaining associates, the anti-German press, and a public attitude tainted by nearly 20 years of Czech chauvinism promoted by Benes had sabotaged their efforts. Prior to meeting Hitler, Hacha told Ribbentrop that he had come to “place the fate of the Czech state in the hands of the Führer."[132]

During their subsequent conversation, Hitler told Hacha that he was sending the German army across the frontier the following day. He had ordered the OKW to prepare the operation three days earlier. The Führer advised his guests to order the Czech army not to resist: “In this case your people still have good prospects for the future. I will guarantee them autonomy far beyond what they could ever have dreamed of in the time of Austria."[133] Hacha duly relayed instructions to his army chief, General Jan Syrovy, to stand down. The German troops who entered Czech territory at 6:00 a.m. on March 15 had orders forbidding them to fire their weapons.



Czech Prime Minister Hacha meets with Hitler in Berlin on March 14, 1939. To the right of the Führer are Göring, Ribbentrop, Keitel and Weizsäcker.

Advanced elements of the German army occupied the Morava-Ostrava industrial complex near the Polish frontier. Warsaw was about to exploit the momentary turmoil in Czechoslovakia to militarily seize the center and hold it for Poland. Local Czech residents understood the German initiative and offered no resistance.[134] The Polish government was angry with Hitler for this rebuff of its ambitions.

The Germans mollified the initial hostility of the Czech people, largely thanks to the efforts of the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV), Germany's national social welfare organization. In the first ten days of the occupation, it distributed RM 7,000,000 worth of food to the distressed population. The NSV freely handed out RM 5,000,000 worth of clothing. The organization concentrated on cities and industrial regions, where shortages were more likely to occur than in rural areas. The German military authorities also arranged for the prompt restocking of grocery and department stores. Relief efforts favored the Czech populace and not the remaining ethnic German colony. The army also guarded against spontaneous attempts by members of the local *Volksdeutsche Partei* (Ethnic German Party) to gain control of the economy or of public administration.[135]

The Germans entered a land with 148,000 unemployed. Demobilization of the Czech army substantially increased the number. The Reich's Ministry of Labor established offices in the Czech Protectorate - as it now became known - to recruit out-of-work persons for German industry. During the first month of the occupation, 15,000 people took advantage of the opportunity and found jobs. Over the next few months, unemployment continued to decline, and in June, the Czech government negotiated trade agreements with Norway, Holland, and several other nations to boost commerce.[136]

Hitler ordered the Czech's peacetime standing army of 150,000 men reduced to 7,000 including 280 officers. Only citizens of Czech nationality could serve. In consideration of the mortification suffered by officers dismissed by the reduction in force, he arranged for them to receive a full military pension regardless of their length of service.[137] The German military administration lasted just one month. The German army commander, Walther von Brauchitsch, dispersed the permanent garrisons to ethnic German communities to reduce offense to the Czechs. At no time during the 1939-1945 war did the Germans induct Czech nationals into their armed forces. Their country remained virtually unscathed throughout the devastating world conflict.

Hacha and his new cabinet resumed control of the government on April 27, 1939. Czech remained the official language. Administrative responsibilities included the interior, education, agriculture, justice, transportation, culture, social services, and public works. Germany managed foreign policy and finance. Hitler appointed Konstantin von Neurath to discharge these duties. In his long diplomatic career, Neurath had often demonstrated sympathy and admiration for the Czechs.

German Army Group Command 3 estimated there were roughly 140,000 German refugees and immigrants in the Sudetenland and Bohemia-Moravia who had settled there to escape National Socialist rule. The German police arrested 2,500 Communists. The assistance of the Czech police facilitated the round-up. On June 7, Hitler declared general amnesty for all Czech political prisoners in the Sudetenland and in their own country.[138] The Germans maintained a permanent force of 5,000 police officers throughout the Protectorate to combat sabotage and Communist subversion. The Czech population experienced more autonomy,

civil liberty and absence of discrimination under German hegemony than Tomas Masaryk and Benes had accorded the Sudeten German, Slovak, and Hungarian minorities during the earlier years of the republic.

The Germans confiscated most Czech army ordnance and integrated it into their own armed forces. German troops briefly entered Slovakian territory to empty Czech military depots near the frontier. The vast quantity of war materiel substantiated Hitler's protest that Czechoslovakia in a coalition with other European powers represented a threat to Germany. During the first week of the occupation, the Germans shipped 24 freight trains filled with military hardware into the Reich. They estimated 500 trains would be necessary to complete the transfer.

Quartermaster General Eduard Wagner wrote his wife on March 30 that the quantity of combat ordnance discovered in this small country was "downright frightening."[139] The inventory included 1,582 aircraft, 2,175 field guns, 468 tanks, 501 anti-aircraft guns, 785 mortars, 43,856 machine guns, over a million rifles, three million artillery rounds, a considerable array of military specialty items such as bridge building equipment and searchlights, plus over a billion rifle rounds for the infantry. It consisted of up-to-date, well-designed weaponry. Modern production facilities such as the Skoda plant were expansive enough to simultaneously fill defense contracts for the USSR.

Ribbentrop sent Dr. Friedrich Berber to Prague with a special research staff to peruse documents in the Czech diplomatic archives dating from March 1938 to March 1939. The team examined records "related to the English and French approach to the Czech question." Based on an abundance of documentary evidence assessed both in Prague and a few months earlier in Vienna, Berber's analysis concluded that London had systematically intervened "in the politics of these countries" in order to "maintain their independence and weaken Germany." The records also revealed that the British "have acted in the same manner regarding Poland," the report deduced. Hitler concluded from the findings that "England wants war."[140]

Poland

Poland declared independence upon the collapse of Russia, and the defeat of the Central Powers in 1918. France supported Polish claims for additional territory in order to strengthen the emerging state. Wilson remarked, "The only real interest of France in Poland is in weakening Germany by giving Poland territory to which she has no right."[141] The French historian and political analyst Jacques Bainville observed, "The liberated peoples of the East have been entrusted with the task of serving as a counterweight to the German multitude."[142]

At this time, the Bolsheviks under Lenin were consolidating their control of Russia. The Red Army invaded Lithuania, which had declared independence in January 1919. The Polish army drove the Bolshevik forces back. Poland's popular military leader, Marshal Joseph Pilsudski, became head of state. An aggressive field commander, he invaded the Ukraine in April 1920 to destroy a Soviet troop concentration on the frontier. Believing that Poland must become "a power equal to the great powers of the world," Pilsudski conquered territories where less than five percent of the population was Polish.[143] The Treaty of Riga ended the see-saw war against the Red Army on March 18, 1921, with Poland gaining Galicia.

On Poland's western frontier in December 1918, the Polish secret military organization, *Polska Organizacya Wojskova* (POW), seized Posen, where Polish and German residents lived in harmony. German *Freikorps* militia launched a successful counterthrust. France's Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch demanded that the Reich's Government withdraw these troops from Posen. Too weak to resist the French ultimatum, German Prime Minister Friedrich Ebert complied. Polish insurgents continued attacking German villages in the region.[144]

President Wilson proposed a plebiscite for Upper Silesia to allow the inhabitants to choose their country. 22,000 POW men staged an insurrection in August 1919 to take the region by force.[145] The *Freikorps* broke the revolt in less than a week. In February 1920, the Inter-Allied Control Commission assumed the administration of Upper Silesia. Over 11,000 French soldiers, supported by small contingents from the Italian and British armies, arrived to supervise the plebiscite. In the spring 1921 poll, 706,820 Silesians cast for union with Germany and 479,414 for Poland. Many Polish residents voted for Germany.[146]

While the Allied commission fumbled with determining the ultimate boundaries, the POW staged another uprising in May 1921. Supplied with French weapons, the insurgents organized an army of 30,000 men. The Polish government officially denied supporting Wojciech Korfanty, the instigator of the revolts. The correspondent for the London *Times* observed ammunition trains passing regularly from Poland into Upper Silesia. The frontier was as “freely traversed as our London Bridge” he wrote on May 10.[147]

Though outnumbered, 25,000 *Freikorps* volunteers counterattacked on May 21, and forced the Poles onto the defensive. Once the Germans began to advance, the French and British stepped in to restore order. In October, the League of Nations awarded nearly a third of the contested territory to Poland. Based on the plebiscite, the entire region should have fallen to Germany. In the portion granted Poland dwelled 40 percent of the Upper Silesian population. It contained six-sevenths of the zinc and lead production, all the iron, and 91 percent of the coal.[148]

Among the lands Germany lost was a 6,300 square-mile vertical strip of West Prussia extending from the Baltic coast down to Upper Silesia. Poland required this corridor, the Allies reasoned, to permit her to have unrestricted access to the sea. Within the corridor was the German port of Danzig. Just 15,000 of the city’s 400,000 inhabitants were Polish. The people of Danzig overwhelmingly demonstrated for union with Germany, but the Peace Commission favored Poland. Lloyd George’s tenacious resistance forced a compromise: the town became a “Free City” under League of Nations jurisdiction, subject to Polish customs administration.

During the Weimar Republic, every German administration and most influential political parties had advocated Poland’s destruction. This attitude prevailed in the Reich’s Foreign Office and in the *Reichswehr* as well. In September 1922, General Hans von Seeckt wrote to Chancellor Joseph Wirth, “Poland’s existence is intolerable and incompatible with Germany’s vital interests. It must disappear, and will do so through its own weakness and through Russia with our aid."[149]

The Polish government’s oppressive minority policy provoked the ire of other European states. Poland’s Jewish, Ukrainian, and German populations suffered legal persecution to disenfranchise them, strip them

of political influence, or force their migration out. The regime dismissed German officials and employees from civil service. It confiscated German farms, closed ethnic schools and forced the pupils to enroll in Polish educational institutions. These measures compelled many Prussian and Silesian Germans to move into Germany. A quarter of the ethnic German population had left Poland by 1926.

Heinrich Brüning, German chancellor from 1930-1932, pursued a trade policy the Poles considered disadvantageous to their commerce. Pilsudski responded by conducting military maneuvers and massing troops near Germany's border. The Polish army concentrated formations in a ring around East Prussia, geographically separated by the corridor from the Reich. In 1930, *Mocarstwowiec (The League of Great Powers)*, a newspaper mirroring Pilsudski's views, published this editorial: "We know that war between Poland and Germany cannot be avoided. We must prepare for this war systematically and energetically. ... In this war there will be no prisoners taken. There will be no place for humanitarian feelings."[150] The Polish general staff had been weighing options for invading the Reich since 1921.[151] German diplomats considered the appointment to Polish foreign minister of Joseph Beck, an army colonel and confidant of Pilsudski's, in November 1932 as indicative of a more militant policy.[152]



Colonel Beck (second from left), with fellow officers at a pre-war army exhibition in Krakau. German analysts suspected that the appointment of a military man to conduct Polish foreign affairs would lead to a more aggressive, anti-German policy.

Polish saber-rattling provoked resentment in Germany. The Reich's Foreign Office refused to renew even minor compacts with Poland about to expire. When Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, relations with his eastern neighbor were strained to the utmost. The Polish press launched a campaign of vilification against the new chancellor. Pilsudski deployed combat divisions near Danzig and reinforced the 82-man garrison guarding the *Westerplatte*. This was an army depot situated on an islet bordering metropolitan Danzig. A Pilsudski subordinate wrote in the quasi-official *Gazeta Polska*, "for the western territories, Poland can and will speak only with the voice of her cannons."[153]

In April 1933, Pilsudski asked Paris for the second time in less than two months to join in a "preventative war" to invade the Reich. The French showed no interest. The German representative in Warsaw, Hans von Moltke, discovered the plan and duly warned Hitler.[154] The Führer sidestepped a confrontation. During his first meeting with the Polish envoy on May 2, 1933, he proved gracious and reassuring. Hitler agreed to a public declaration that his government would observe all Polish-German treaties currently in force. In his foreign policy speech to the Reichstag on May 17, the German chancellor spoke of "finding a solution to satisfy the

understandable demands of Poland just as much as Germany's natural rights."[155]

In November, Hitler offered Pilsudski a friendship and non-aggression pact. Only after another discreet, unsuccessful bid to enlist France for his "preventative war" hobbyhorse did the marshal agree. The two governments ratified a ten-year treaty the following January. New trade agreements provided a fresh market for Poland's depressed economy. Hitler banned newspaper editorials addressing German claims in the East. Warsaw relaxed the anti-German tendency of its own press. The Führer directed Danzig's National Socialist senate to cease complaining to the League of Nations about Polish violations of legal compacts there.

The German public disapproved of Hitler's rapprochement toward Poland. U.S. Ambassador William Dodd reported that even convinced National Socialists were disillusioned that the Führer had concluded a pact with Warsaw.[156] Prussian nobles in the general staff and foreign office harbored anti-Polish sentiments and likewise rejected the change of policy. In October 1935, Moltke cabled from Warsaw, "Today the German minority in Poland feels left in the lurch by the German Reich."[157] Hitler stayed on course. Warsaw's new emissary in Berlin, Joseph Lipski, experienced a warmth and popularity among his hosts previously unimaginable for a Polish diplomat.

After Pilsudski's death in May 1935, two government officials assumed virtual autonomy in their respective ministries, much to the detriment of Polish-German relations. These were Foreign Minister Beck and the army commander-in-chief, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly. Both were disciples of an expansionist foreign policy.

The friendship treaty with Germany evoked little sense of obligation on Poland's part. From Warsaw, Moltke informed his superiors, "The Poles think that they no longer need to restrict their steps against the German minority. They must be gaining the impression from the lack of any reaction in the German press, that all infringements will be accepted by German public opinion without objection."[158] In February 1936, the German consul general in Thorn, Kiichler, wrote Berlin about the disproportionate transfer of German farms into Polish hands through government-implemented land reform: "As much German property as

possible is supposed to be broken up before expiration of the ten-year agreement."[159] Consul Nöldeke in Katowice described how on March 15, “In Königshiitte, an assembly of the German Farmers Union was dispersed by a mob armed with sticks and clubs, during which German performers of the Upper Silesian country theater who were uninvolved bystanders were physically abused."[160]

Diplomatic relations between Poland and the Reich further deteriorated due to a simultaneous tariff dispute. Dissatisfied with Germany’s compensation for coal trains crossing the corridor from the Reich to supply East Prussia’s energy needs, Warsaw announced in January 1936 that it would curtail 50 to 80 percent of German rail traffic there. The Polish Ministry of Transportation threatened to block it completely during negotiations.[161] In March, Beck informed the French that Poland was ready to join France in a war against Germany.[162] Marshal Rydz-Smigly visited Paris in September. He persuaded the French to loan Poland $500 million in cash and war materiel to upgrade the Polish army. Warsaw already devoted over a third of the budget to armaments, even though the country suffered one of the highest illiteracy rates in Europe and much of the population lived in poverty.[163] Rydz-Smigly ordered General Tadeusz Kutrzeba to draft a war plan against Germany. Completed in January 1938, the study envisioned a war with the Reich for 1939. To date, Hitler had never made a threatening gesture to Poland.

Of all territories robbed from the Reich after World War I, the German people felt most keenly the loss of Danzig and the lands taken by Poland. To placate his own public and remove one more obstacle to improving relations with Warsaw, Hitler required at least a nominal correction of the Versailles arrangement. He limited his proposal to two revisions. First, he asked to construct an Autobahn and railroad line across the corridor to connect Germany with East Prussia. The German diplomat Julius Schnurre had already suggested this to Beck in 1935 without receiving an answer.[164] Secondly, Hitler wanted Danzig to come under German sovereignty. In return, he was prepared to acknowledge Germany’s eastern border fixed by the Allied Peace Commission as final, something no Weimar administration had hitherto done, and offer Poland a 25-year non-aggression pact.

The Autobahn plan meant that Hitler was willing to renounce an entire province in exchange for a strip of real estate wide enough to accommodate a highway. Financed by the Reich, the project would utilize Polish labor and construction materials to help relieve unemployment in Poland. The recovery of Danzig required even less of Warsaw. The Danzig territory, encompassing 730 square miles, was under League of Nations, not Polish, jurisdiction. Regarding the city's value as a harbor, the Poles no longer needed it for nautical export; further up the coast they had constructed the port city of Gydnia, which opened in 1926. Offering economic incentives to shippers, they had taken more than half of Danzig's commerce by 1930.

Hitler's package called for the Reich's forfeiture of Upper Silesia with its valuable industry, Posen and West Prussia. These provinces had been German for centuries and had belonged to Germany less than 20 years before. Nevertheless, it would abandon nearly a million ethnic Germans residing there to foreign rule, despite the fact that since March 1933, the Reich's Foreign Office had documented 15,000 cases of abuse against Poland's ethnic German colony.[165] The Führer was willing to publicly announce that no more territorial issues exist with Poland. No Weimar administration could have survived such an offer.

Meeting in Berchtesgaden with Polish Ambassador Lipski on October 24, 1938, Ribbentrop brought the German revisions to the table. His guest disputed the Reich's perception of Danzig's status as a "product of Versailles." Only Poland's rise, Lipski contended, had lifted the city from "insignificance." He told Ribbentrop that public opinion would never accept the city's transfer to Germany.[166] Warsaw reaffirmed Lipski's position in writing on October 31. The letter conceded that Poland was prepared to guarantee the right of "Danzig's German minority" to preserve its national and cultural identity.[167] Describing the population of a city that was 96 percent German as a minority was a studied provocation which Hitler decided to overlook. The Polish press campaign against Germany resumed.

On January 5, 1939, Beck visited Germany to negotiate with Hitler. The Führer insisted that Danzig's return to Germany must be a part of any final settlement with Poland. He reassured Beck that the Reich would never simply declare that the city has returned to Germany and present

Warsaw with a fait accompli. He pledged that no final arrangement would deprive Poland of her access to the sea. Beck asked for time to weigh the situation carefully.

In mid-January, Beck told Rydz-Smigly of his decision to reject the German proposals, though two weeks later he mendaciously reassured Ribbentrop that he was still contemplating the matter. A wave of fresh persecution swept over the ethnic German minority. On February 25, the British ambassador there, Sir Howard Kennard, reported to Halifax on a dialog with Moltke concerning farmhands and industrial workers in Poland who "were being dismissed because they happened to be Germans." In addition to the forced closing of German schools, it was becoming practically impossible for a German living in Poland to earn enough to exist. Kennard concluded that there was "little likelihood of the Polish authorities doing anything to improve matters."[168]

An unrelated episode aggravated tensions. On March 22, the Germans recovered Memel from Lithuania. This was a narrow, 700-square mile strip of northeastern Prussia which the Lithuanians seized by force in 1923. The League of Nations demanded that the territory be governed according to democratic principles. In the 1925 elections, 94 percent of the voters – including many Lithuanian residents – cast for German parties. The Lithuanian government in Kaunas refused to recognize the results. The entire country fell under a dictatorship the following year. The authorities began jailing Prussian residents found guilty of "preserving German heritage."[169]

After the Austrian Anschluss, Memel-Germans organized public demonstrations. In November 1938, Kaunas offered to negotiate with Berlin over the region's future. In an internationally supervised plebiscite in December, 87 percent of voters decided for union with Germany. Ribbentrop promised Lithuanian Foreign Minister Juozas Urbsys economic incentives for his country. Upon the transfer of Memel back to Germany, the Lithuanians employed their own dock workers and administrative personnel at the harbor there. They also operated a railroad across the now-German strip of Memel territory directly connecting the port to Lithuania. This was the same solution that Hitler had proposed to Warsaw regarding Danzig and the corridor.

During the weeks before the final settlement with Kaunas, Berlin deployed the three army divisions garrisoned in East Prussia on the border with Memel. Rydz-Smigly declared this to be evidence that Germany was about to annex Danzig.[170] On March 23, 1939, he accordingly mobilized a large part of Poland's army reserve. Since Memel was at the opposite end of the province from Danzig, the three divisions were actually moving *away* from the city that Rydz-Smigly claimed they were about to seize. The Memel affair coincided with Germany's occupation of the Czech rump-state on March 15. Beck exploited the occasion to negotiate with London to form an alliance against Germany. On March 24, Beck told Lipski and senior members of his staff that Hitler was losing the faculty to think and act rationally. Poland's "determined resistance" might bring him to his senses. Otherwise, Beck proclaimed, "We will fight!"[171]

Hitler maintained a conciliatory posture. His army commander-in-chief, General Brauchitsch, noted, "Führer does not want to settle the Danzig question by force." Hitler cancelled a March 24 directive that the diplomat Ernst von Weizsäcker had prepared for Moltke as a guideline for resuming negotiations. The Führer considered it "somewhat harshly formulated" and objected to its tenor "confronting the Poles with a sort of friend-or-foe option."[172]

Returning to Berlin, Lipski delivered a letter to Ribbentrop on March 26 formally rejecting the Danzig-Autobahn proposal. Lipski bluntly told his host, "Any further pursuit of these German plans, especially as far as the return of Danzig to the Reich is concerned, will mean war with Poland."[173] This threat, together with Rydz-Smigly's partial mobilization against Germany, violated the 1934 non-aggression and friendship treaty: The pact stated word for word, "Under no circumstances will (the signatories) resort to the use of force for the purpose of settling issues in controversy."[174]

The British responded favorably to an alliance with Poland. The western democracies had just lost Czechoslovakia as an ally flanking the Reich. Her military-industrial resources were now at German disposal. The British army chief of staff warned Chamberlain that in the event of war against Germany, it would be better to have Poland on the Allies' side. On March 30, Kennard received instructions from London to present the British offer

to guarantee Poland. Beck accepted immediately. The next day, Chamberlain explained the details in the House of Commons: "In the event of any action which clearly threatens Polish independence and which the Polish government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish government all support in their power."[175]



Foreign journalists interview ethnic Germans who had fled their homesteads in Western Poland and sought refuge in the Reich in the summer of 1939.

Beck visited London to conclude details for the alliance on April 3. On the 23rd, Warsaw mobilized another 334,000 army reservists, again in the absence of threats from Germany.[176]

Hitler addressed the Reichstag on April 28. He explained how the Anglo-Polish agreement obligated the Poles to take a military position against the Reich, should it enter into an armed conflict with any state guaranteed by England. Hitler continued, "This obligation contradicts the agreement I previously made with Marshal Pilsudski; since the (1934) agreement only takes into account obligations already in existence at that time, namely Poland's commitments regarding France. To belatedly expand these commitments is contrary to the German-Polish non-

aggression pact. Under these circumstances, I would never have concluded this pact back then; for what sense does it make to have a non-aggression pact, if it leaves a number of exceptions for one partner practically wide open?"[177] Hitler voided the compact. He added in his speech that he would welcome a Polish initiative to negotiate a new treaty governing Polish-German relations.

Warsaw's agreement with London opened a floodgate of war scares and hostile editorials in the Polish press. The German consul general in Posen reported to Berlin on March 31, "Scarcely a day goes by in which Posen newspapers don't publish more or less aggressive articles or insulting observations about Germans."[178] Although Hitler had personally instructed his foreign office that there must be "no talk of war" in the negotiations, the French ambassador in Warsaw, Leon Noel, reported to Paris, "Patriotic sentiment among the Poles has reached a zenith in all parties and classes, thanks to the German threats."[179]

Poland's ethnic German community suffered the backlash of media-generated Polish chauvinism. On April 13, the German consul in Danzig cabled to Berlin that rural Germans in the corridor "are so cowed that they have already buried their most valuable possessions. They no longer risk traversing roads and fields by daylight. They spend their nights in hiding places beyond the farms, for fear of being attacked."[180]

The May 11 edition of the Polish newspaper *Dziennik Bydgoski {Bromberg Daily News)* published an editorial asserting that the Germans in Poland "know that in case of war, no indigenous enemy will escape alive. The Führer is far away but the Polish soldier close by, and in the woods there's no shortage of limbs." The previous month, the Polish mayor of Bromberg, a town with a comparatively large German population, told journalists that if Hitler invaded there, he'd be stepping over the corpses of Bromberg's Germans.[181]

Beck explained his policy to the Polish parliament on May 5. He claimed that Danzig was not German, but has belonged to Poland for centuries. He attributed the city's prosperity to commerce conducted by Poland ferrying export wares into Danzig via the Vistula River, omitting the fact that the waterway was no longer navigable, thanks to 19 years of improper maintenance under Polish administration. Beck disparaged Hitler's offer to

recognize Polish sovereignty over the corridor, Posen, and Upper Silesia in exchange for Danzig. Since the provinces were already incorporated into Poland, he argued, Hitler was giving nothing in return. “A nation with self-respect makes no one-sided concessions,” he crowed.[182]

Historians praise Beck for defiantly defending his country from becoming a German satellite. Since Hitler’s proposal included an offer for Poland to join the Anti-Comintern Pact, reaching a Danzig settlement with the Reich would have supposedly drawn the Poles into an alliance with Germany against the USSR. Warsaw would then have eventually become embroiled in Hitler’s planned military crusade against Russia. Beyond the fact that no German documents exist to support this theory, it overlooks the essence of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Its purpose was to promote cooperation among civilized nations to prevent internal Communist subversion. Governments would share intelligence, much in the same way that Interpol affiliates do to combat global terrorism today. Also, Hitler had expressed his often-quoted ideas about invading Russia when he wrote *Mein Kampf during* the previous decade. After the Bolsheviks consolidated power in the former Czarist empire, the Führer no longer advocated such an option.

Through personal observation and discussions with diplomats in Berlin, Henderson was able to convey to London a realistic picture of German opinion. He wrote Halifax in May, “It must be borne in mind that Danzig and the corridor was *the* big question prior to 1933. One of the most unpopular actions which Hitler ever did was his 1934 treaty with Pilsudski. He had the whole of his party against him. Today the most moderate Germans, who are opposed to a world war, are behind him in his present offer to Poland.” Henderson added that foreign emissaries in Berlin also consider Hitler’s proposals justifiable: “According to my Belgian colleague, practically all the diplomatic representatives here regard the German offer in itself as a surprisingly favorable one."[183]

Henderson grasped that Hitler’s package was not a demand for Polish territory but accepted a significant *loss* of formerly German lands to Poland. In a May 17 dispatch to Halifax, Henderson wrote, “The fact that what was regarded here as a generous offer of a 25-year German guarantee of the existing Polish frontier in exchange for a satisfactory settlement of the Danzig and Corridor problem had been rejected out of

hand by Poland has not only incensed Herr Hitler personally, but has made a deep impression on the country as a whole."[184]

The ambassador also referred to “the traditional German feeling of hatred for Poland, particularly in the army, and Polish ingratitude for Germany’s past services.” On May 16, Henderson summarized a conversation with Weizsäcker in a letter to Sir Miles Cadogan, the undersecretary in the Foreign Office: “He like all Germans feels bitterly about the Poles. They grabbed what they could after Vienna and Munich and then bit the hand that fed them on these occasions. That is the German view nor is there a single German who does not regard Hitler’s offer to Poland as excessively generous and broadminded."[185]

Hitler understood that he could never normalize relations with Poland without a Danzig settlement. The British guarantee for Poland had robbed Hitler of the opportunity to withdraw his demands without losing face. On April 3, 1939, he ordered the OKW to draft a study for combat operations against Poland. He stipulated that the military solution would only be exercised “if Warsaw revises its policy toward Germany and assumes a posture threatening to the Reich."[186]

Berlin continued to receive reports from its consulates in Poland regarding harsh treatment of the German colony there. On May 8, on instructions from Hitler, press chief Otto Dietrich directed newspaper editors to “practice a certain restraint in reporting such incidents” and not publish them on the front page.[187] Regarding the Polish media, Henderson observed, “The fantastic claims of irresponsible Polish elements for domination over East Prussia and other German territory afford cheap fuel to the flames."[188]

In June, Hubert Gladwyn Jebb and Sir William Strang of the British Foreign Office visited Warsaw. Jebb sent back a report on the 9th that summarized the discussions with Polish government ministers and army officers. He quoted a Polish economist in Warsaw’s foreign ministry as describing how Polish farmers anticipated generous grants of German land after the war with Germany.[189] Jebb opined that the Polish general staff was “overly optimistic” and that officials in Warsaw had become “amazingly arrogant” since the British guarantee.[190] The following month,

British General Sir Edmund Ironside visited Poland. Rydz-Smigly told him that war with Germany is unavoidable.[191] None of the British emissaries said anything to the Poles to mollify this bellicose attitude.

Since June, as reported by Moltke, 70 percent of the Germans in Upper Silesia were out of work, compared to Poland's national unemployment rate of 16 percent. The Reich's Government registered 70,000 ethnic German refugees who had recently fled Polish sovereign territory. Another 15,000 had taken refuge in Danzig. Among the acts of brutality inflicted on those still in Poland were five

documented cases of castration. Kennard protested to the Polish government about the abuse of the German minority. The complaint "did not appear to have had any definite results," he notified his superiors.[192]

The crisis also focused on Danzig, still administered by League of Nations Commissioner Carl Burckhardt but under Poland's customs union. The city's senate was embroiled in a perpetual controversy over the conduct of the Polish tariff inspectors. Originally numbering six, in 1939 the roster had climbed to well over 100. Polish officials performing these duties roamed areas beyond their jurisdiction, primarily interested in potential military details.[193] They rendezvoused at Danzig's rail terminal, which was under Polish administration. A transmitter there relayed intelligence to Warsaw. In the event of war, the inspectors were to lead irregular troops, supplied from arms caches concealed in the city, to hold positions in Danzig until the Polish army arrived.[194]

Danzig's senate president, Arthur Greiser, protested to the Polish commissioner in Danzig, Marjan Chodaki, on June 3, 1939, about the customs inspectors. Chodaki replied that the number of his customs agents was still insufficient, because German inspectors were not doing their job. He threatened economic sanctions against Danzig. In another note on August 4, Chodaki stated that Polish customs officials would henceforth be armed. Interference with their activity would result in an immediate reprisal against Danzig; the Poles threatened to block the import of foodstuffs. Beck informed Kennard that Poland would intervene militarily if the Danzig senate failed to comply with Polish terms.[195]

On August 9, Weizsäcker met with the Polish chargé de affaires in

Berlin, Michael Lubomirski. He protested the Polish ultimatum to Danzig of August 4. Sanctions against the “Free City", Weizsäcker warned, may result in Danzig seeking stronger economic ties with Germany herself. The next day, an undersecretary in Warsaw’s foreign ministry told the German chargé de affaires that any involvement by the Reich’s Government in the Danzig issue would be regarded by Poland as an act of war.[196] Rydz-Smigly contributed to tensions with remarks made in a public speech: “Soon we'll be marching against the hereditary German enemy to finally knock out his poison fangs. The first step on this march will be Danzig. . . . Keep ready for the day of reckoning with this arrogant Germanic race!"[197] Burckhardt described Poland’s intentions as “excessively belligerent."[198]

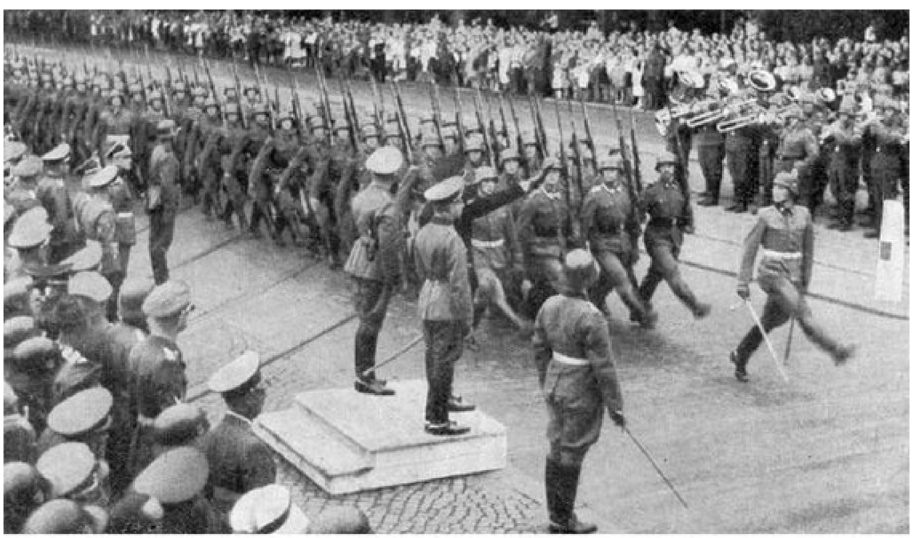
Warsaw issued an official press release detailing how Greiser had withdrawn his demands after the note exchange with Chodaki. According to the Polish press, a single, mildly harsh note had “forced Hitler to his knees."[199] The Anglo-French media triumphantly reported that the Führer had had to “climb down.” Hitler told Burckhardt on August 11, “The press said I lost my nerve, that threats are the only way to deal with me. That we backed down when the Poles stood firm, that I had only been bluffing last year, and my bluff flopped thanks to Poland’s courage that the Czechs didn't have. I've read idiotic remarks in the French press that I lost my nerve while the Poles kept theirs."[200]

Hitler asked Burckhardt, “Could you go yourself to London? If we want to avoid catastrophes, the matter is rather urgent."[201] Halifax, certainly no friend of Germany, cabled Kennard on August 15, “I have the impression that Hitler is still undecided and anxious to avoid war."[202] The day before, Roger Makins in the British Foreign Office wrote England’s delegate in Geneva, Frank Walter, that the Führer wanted to open negotiations to prevent an armed clash.

Historians assert that Hitler was determined to invade Poland. However, had this been his intention, he could have instructed the Danzig senate to pass a resolution abolishing League of Nations jurisdiction and returning the city to the Reich’s sovereignty. This would have provoked the Polish military response Beck warned of, and Germany could then intervene with her own army in order to defend the Danzig population’s right to self-determination. Given the sensitive issue of democratic principles, and the

fact that Poland was striking the first blow, it would then have been difficult for Britain to justify support for Poland under the provisions of the guarantee.

The Polish government rounded up “disloyal” ethnic Germans and transported them to concentration camps.[203] Authorities closed daily traffic between Upper Silesia and Germany, preventing thousands of ethnic Germans from commuting to their jobs in the Reich. Polish coastal anti-aircraft batteries fired on Lufthansa passenger planes flying over the Baltic Sea to East Prussia.[204] The Luftwaffe provided fighter escorts for the airliners. In Danzig, the police chief formed his law enforcement personnel into two rifle regiments. In defiance of the League of Nations charter, the city re-militarized. The Germans transferred a battalion from SS Death’s Head Regiment 4 to Danzig. The 1,500-man “SS Home Guard Danzig” paraded publicly on Danzig’s May Field on August 18. The Poles evacuated the families of their civil servants, fortified public buildings and installations with armor plate or barbed wire and posted machine gun nests at bridges.[205]



Two weeks before the outbreak of war, the SS Home Guard Danzig parades in the Free City before *Gauleiter* Albert Forster.

In his directive to the armed forces the previous April, Hitler had cited isolating Poland as a prerequisite for the military option. On August 23, Germany concluded a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The pact, signed in Moscow, contained a secret clause defining mutual spheres of interest. It stated, “The question of whether or not maintaining an

independent Polish state will appear desirable for both parties' interests, and how this state should be divided, can be clarified in the course of further political developments.” In return for roughly half of Poland, the Soviet dictator gave Germany a free hand to invade. The Germans hoped that news of Soviet-German rapprochement would demonstrate to Beck that his country’s position had become precarious, compelling him to return to the conference table.[206] Beck however, dismissed the alliance as untenable, because Russia and Germany harbored a serious ideological rivalry. A Warsaw communiqué stated, “The conclusion of the non-aggression pact has no influence on Poland’s situation or policy."[207]

On August 23, Hitler told his armed forces adjutant that the military must be ready to invade Poland by the morning of the 26th . The Führer then postponed the attack, explaining to General Keitel that he needed to “gain time for further negotiations,” still seeking a “solution without bloodshed."[208] The Poles, without provocation from Germany, closed Danzig’s borders. Since the metropolis imported much of its foodstuffs, this created a critical situation for the population.

Hitler and Göring requested British mediation to help persuade Warsaw to resume talks. From Warsaw, Kennard cabled London on August 25 that, were Beck or Lipski to seek an audience with Hitler, the Führer would consider this a “sign of weakness” and respond with an ultimatum.[209] Chamberlain concluded the alliance with Poland the same day.

Along the German-Polish frontier, Polish border guards fired on ethnic German refugees attempting to flee into Germany. German infantry patrols crossed into Poland and fought to free them. On the 26th, a Polish cavalry unit rode boldly through German villages near Neidenburg in East Prussia. The German army’s Artillery Regiment 57 engaged the horsemen on sovereign Reich territory. The Poles withdrew, leaving 47 dead on the battlefield.[210] Hitler told Ribbentrop, “I would like to think that Beck and Lipski have good intentions. But they are no longer in control of the situation. They are captives of a public attitude that has become white-hot through the excesses of their own propaganda and the bragging of the military. Even if they wanted to negotiate, they aren't in a position to do so. This is the real root of the tragedy.” Ribbentrop handed Hitler a telegram describing three further incidents of Polish gunners firing on

German commercial aircraft. The Führer responded, “This is pure anarchy. What are we supposed to do?"[211]

On August 29, Hitler received a half-hearted pledge from London to urge the Poles to enter negotiations, without, however, stating when. Tired of these dilatory tactics, Hitler wrote back that he expected a Polish diplomat empowered to negotiate by the following day. Examining the note in front of Hitler that evening, Henderson protested that it “has the ring of an ultimatum.” The Führer retorted, “This sentence only emphasizes the urgency of the moment. Consider that at any time it could come to a serious incident, when two mobilized armies are confronting one another.” Henderson insisted that the deadline was too short. Hitler responded, “We've been repeating the same thing for a week. . . . This senseless game can't go on forever.... My people are bleeding day after day."[212] In Warsaw, Beck, Rydz-Smigly and the defense minister, Tadeusz Kasprzycki, conferred. They decided to declare general mobilization the next morning.

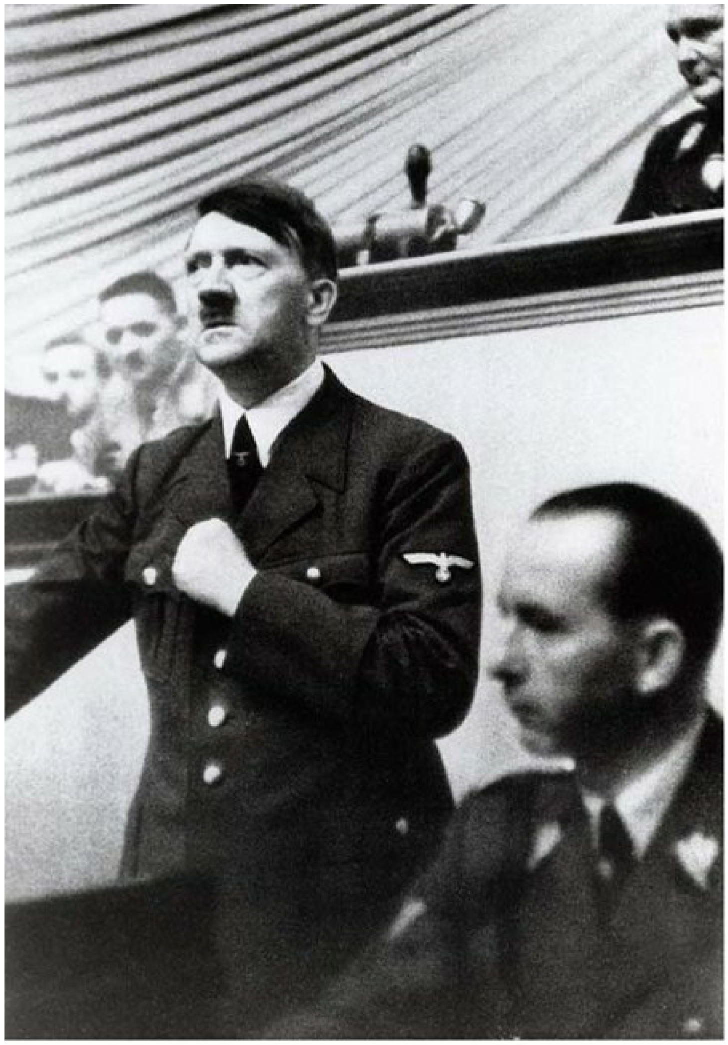
German diplomats and lawyers spent the morning of August 30 preparing the 16-point Marienwerder proposal as a basis for discussions with the Poles. The salient points were Danzig’s immediate return to the Reich, a German transit route linking East Prussia to Germany, Gydnia remaining under Polish sovereignty, a minority protection treaty, and a plebiscite for the population of the northern corridor region. Göring emphasized that the Führer is trying to avoid infringement of Poland’s vital interests.[213] Henderson confessed to London that Hitler is considering how generous he can be.

Chamberlain’s cabinet concluded that the proposal does not harm Poland’s interests nor threaten her independence. Even the suggested corridor plebiscite should not have concerned Warsaw, since it claimed that the population there was 90 percent Polish.[214] The French government recommended to the Poles that they negotiate. London telegraphed Kennard, instructing him to formally protest Poland’s recent practice of shooting at German refugees.

The Polish Foreign Office assumed that Hitler would interpret any willingness on its part to negotiate as a sign of weakness. In reality, simply receiving the German 16-point plan represented no threat to Poland. It

would have opened a dialog, and at the very least postponed the outbreak of war. The Poles could have broken off the discussions if Berlin imposed an ultimatum. They could then have fully relied on the support of the Western powers. Beck however, wanted no negotiations. On August 31, he cabled Lipski with instructions to inform Ribbentrop that Warsaw will “weigh the recommendation of the British government (to negotiate) in a favorable light and give a formal answer to this question in a few hours."[215]

In the same message, Beck instructed his ambassador not to discuss anything with the Germans, and that he is not authorized to receive their proposals. That morning, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes tried to give a copy of Hitler’s 16-point program to Lipski at the Polish embassy in Berlin. The Pole refused, replying that “in the event of war, civil strife will break out in this country and Polish troops will march successfully to Berlin."[216]



Addressing the Reichstag on September 1, Hitler blamed Poland's "mobilization, increased terrorism and mounting pressure on the ethnic Germans" for the outbreak of hostilities.

The radio monitoring station in the Reich's Air Ministry intercepted Beck's transmission ordering Lipski not to accept a copy of Germany's Marienwerder proposals. Hitler now knew that Poland would not compromise over Danzig and the corridor. He nonetheless postponed the military operation once more, upon Göring's request for a last-minute conference with Henderson and the Swedish mediator Birger Dahlerus.[217] Later that day, Göring's conference took place. He showed Henderson a transcript of Beck's instructions sent to Lipski. Henderson wrote Halifax, "The highly efficient German intelligence system proved its worth that afternoon in Berlin. Beck's telephone call, including the secret message,

was instantly decoded. Here was proof to the German Government of Poland's delaying tactics and refusal to negotiate seriously."[218]

The meeting between Henderson and Göring was cordial, but failed to reach a solution. A session between Lipski and Ribbentrop the same evening was also fruitless. Hitler summoned Keitel at 9:00p.m. The directive he gave the general began, "Now that all political possibilities for relieving the intolerable conditions for Germany on her eastern border by peaceful means are exhausted, I have decided for a solution by force."[219] Less than eight hours later, the German armed forces invaded Poland.

Historical documents reveal that the attack on Poland was not a step in a long-planned, systematic program to expand Germany's living space. Hitler ordered the offensive upon the failure to achieve a negotiated settlement. Among the most important issues was the welfare of the ethnic German colony beyond the Reich's borders, though to wage war for the sake of people related by blood, but no longer by nationality, may today seem unjustified. The present-day "global community" concept rejects the notion that a nation can be defined more by its race than by geographical boundaries. During the 1930's, however, pride of ethnic heritage was a powerful force in the consciousness of the European peoples.

The 1938 Munich Accord, by which Germany regained the Sudeten territory populated by ethnic Germans under foreign rule, was regarded by the Reich's Foreign Office as a legal precedent: "The right of protection from the mother state was fundamentally acknowledged once and for all, through an international act in which the four Great Powers and three other states took part."[220] In August 1939, Hitler confronted a serious situation regarding Danzig and the German minority in Poland. Blockaded by the Poles since August 24, the Free City's German population faced economic ruin and potential starvation. During the month's final days, Polish radicals murdered over 200 ethnic German residents of western Poland.[221] "German intervention was completely legitimate in accordance with on one hand, the right of the mother state to protect its ethnic families living under foreign rule, and on the other hand, with respect to their right to self-determination," as a German diplomat asserted.[222] Hitler wrote Daladier on August 27, "I would despair of an

honorable future for my people, if under such circumstances we were not resolved to settle the matter no matter what."[223]



In the city that Chamberlain announced needed protection from Germany, citizens of Danzig welcome the first German troops to enter after war broke out with Poland.

Beyond the moral and legal issues was that of national security. As mentioned, the Germans had discovered documents in Vienna and Prague revealing a covert policy of the British Foreign Office to weaken Germany. Chamberlain's arbitration of the 1938 Sudetenland crisis had satisfied Hitler's demands but also had rescued Czechoslovakia; at that time, Britain and France had not been equipped to wage war to defend this small but useful ally. Once Czechoslovakia collapsed in March 1939, the Anglo-French lost an integral component of their "collective security" alliance system. London's public guarantee of Poland followed immediately. Hitler surmised that Chamberlain's purpose for this declaration was to turn Poland against Germany, to replace one hostile state on the Reich's eastern frontier with another. The Führer told his architect, Hermann Giesler, that he believed that the coalition forming against Germany wanted war: "I must strive to prevent the encirclement of Germany or punch through it, regardless of what direction."[224]

On August 9, 1939, Henderson had written Undersecretary Cadogan in London that both the Germans and the Italians believed that Poland would

attempt to settle the dispute with the Reich by force that year, before British support becomes lukewarm.[225] In Warsaw, army commanders and certain Polish politicians recommended challenging Germany soon, since the cost of indefinitely maintaining so many soldiers on active duty was too great a strain on the national budget.[226] The general mobilization Poland announced on August 30 was another ominous sign for Hitler. Feeling threatened both to the east and to the west, he opted to strike first. One could perhaps judge his decision in the spirit of a maxim of Prussia's 18th Century monarch Friedrich the Great. He declared that in war, the real aggressor is he who forces the enemy to fire the first shot.

Chapter 4

Europe in the Vice

Balance of Power

The only Great Power to initially protect Germany from the harsher consequences of the Versailles Treaty, Britain ironically became Hitler's primary obstacle in negotiating its revision. This reversal actually conformed to a British policy known as the balance of power. England traditionally supported Europe's weaker states to prevent any one country from becoming too powerful and imposing her will on her neighbors. When the Reich was down-and-out after World War I, the British favored its recovery, but as German prosperity improved under Hitler, English support declined.

Das ist England (*That's England*), a set of essays the NSDAP published in 1941, pointed out that "England no longer regards herself as a member bound by fate to the European community, but as the motherland of an overseas colonial empire."[1] A separate German study maintained that English diplomacy strives for "a balance of power among the nations and states of the mainland, but not...to create tranquility, security, living space and peace for them. On the contrary, it is purely to square them off against one another in as equal, long and lingering a struggle as possible. . . . Without the major wars of the last few centuries and without continuous interference from England, the European states would undoubtedly have achieved a rapid inner consolidation, and England would not have been able to build her own empire so undisturbed."[2] *Das ist England* summarized that for the English, "it was never a matter of protecting the weak, but always of securing their own power."[3]

The British opposed awarding German territory to Poland in 1919. Their disapproval of France's military occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 discouraged the French from joining with Pilsudski to attack Germany. Many prominent Englishmen, among them the editorial staff of the London *Times*,

supported the Reich's right to rearm. The *Daily Express* argued that Germany only wanted parity but France wanted superiority.[4]

Once chancellor, Hitler hoped to nurture good relations with England. In January 1934, he ordered the army to return the kettle drums of the Gordon Highlanders, which the Germans had captured on the battlefield in 1914. At a ceremony in the Berlin War Ministry, the Germans presented the former trophies to Sir Jan Hamilton to restore them to their regiment in Scotland. Hitler also concluded the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in June 1935, which imposed restrictions on German rearmament but not on England's.[5]

Hitler additionally gave a conciliatory interview to Ward Price, the European correspondent of the *Daily Mail:* "On August 4, 1914, I was very distressed that the two great Germanic peoples, who had lived at peace with one another throughout all the disputes and fluctuations in human history for so many centuries, were drawn into war. I would be pleased if this unfortunate atmosphere would finally come to an end and the two related nations could rediscover their old friendship. The assertion that the German people are enthusiastically preparing for war is a misunderstanding of the German revolution. We find it simply incomprehensible. We leaders of the German nation had almost without exception been front-line soldiers. I would like to see the front-line soldier who wants to prepare for another war."[6]

The Reich's economic revival and development of overseas markets for manufactured goods created competition for England abroad. Hitler's emphasis on German autarky and opposition to free trade, the system of unlimited international exchange of wares promoted by Britain, deepened the rivalry. The Führer's persistent disarmament proposals and endeavors to improve relations with neighboring states provided a basis for a continental unity that was contradictory to English balance-of-power diplomacy.

No less repugnant to Britain was the state form and social structure evolving within Germany. The fall of the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg dynasties in 1918 had substantially diminished the influence of the German aristocracy. The National Socialists were replacing it with a leadership cadre based on talent and initiative rather than on wealth and

social status. The British ruling class intuitively sensed the danger such a revolution, if successful, posed for its own privileged position. German programs to improve the well-being of labor were unprecedented in the British Commonwealth. The German example evoked the specter of English workers demanding disability benefits, safer on-the-job conditions, state-sponsored holidays for their families and better housing.

One German journalist wrote this on the subject: “Just when the vacation cruises were about to begin, a representative of the British consul general arrived at the Hamburg office of the Strength through Joy organization. He asked whether there were any plans to have German workers' vacation ships put in at English ports. He was instructed to advise us that the British government regards putting in at English harbors, or even cruising within sight of the English coast, unwelcome."[7]

As a champion of liberal democracy, England took umbrage at the German socialist principle of subordinating the rights of the individual to the welfare of the community. English labor objected to the well-publicized dissolution of Germany’s trade unions, unaware that protection of the worker was nevertheless a primary thrust of Hitler’s chancellorship. Germans who had chosen exile in England influenced British public opinion against the Reich with stories of oppression under National Socialist rule. They received ample coverage in the English media.

By 1936, relations between the two countries approached genuine antagonism. Germany’s flourishing economy continually increased her leverage in European trade. Rearmament had strengthened Hitler’s hand in diplomacy, and the remilitarization of the Rhineland had demonstrated France’s inability to check Germany. Furthermore, the Führer supported Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia despite League of Nations' opposition. England’s foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, added to the mix a questionnaire sent in March to Berlin that the Germans considered an affront. It asked whether Germany was ready to conclude “sincere” treaties she would adhere to.[8]

Hitler appointed Ribbentrop ambassador to Britain in August. His primary mission was to win the English for the Anti-Comintern. Arriving in London in October, Ribbentrop declared that he had come to warn his host nation of the dangers of Bolshevism and to negotiate an alliance against

the Soviet Union. Eden put such notions to rest. In a speech at Leamington on November 20, he announced that a lasting arrangement with Germany could only be realized within the framework of the British-sponsored “general settlement” in Europe. Hitler understood this as a “slightly revised edition” of the Versailles construction.[9]

Winston Churchill, a career politician who had held various administrative posts over previous decades, was already vocalizing the anti-German sentiments that earned him and his devotees the nickname “war party” in Hitler’s vocabulary. Exaggerating the strength of Germany’s “terrible war machine,” he predicted that her demands for a free hand in Eastern and Southern Europe and for the return of her colonies may lead to war. An editorial in the periodical *Deutsche diplomatisch-politische Korrespondenz (German Diplomatic-Political Correspondence)* gives insight into the impasse in Anglo-German relations: “The Churchill cabal misrepresents any removal of a sore spot by Germany as really preparations for implementing belligerent intentions somewhere else, therefore evidence of a 'German threat.' If this method of misrepresentation becomes common practice, all trust will vanish and the incentive for any sort of international cooperation will be lost."[10]

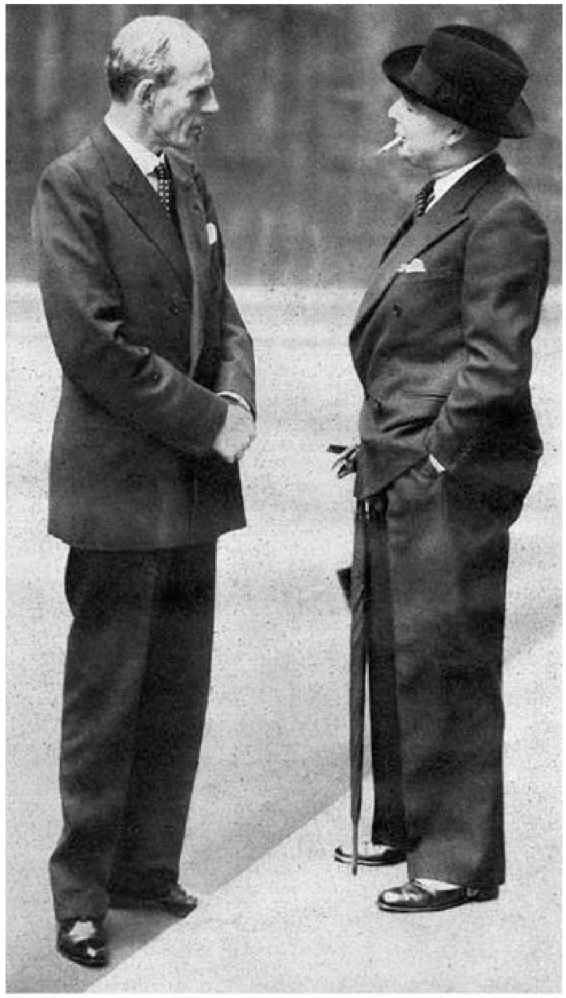
Mutual mud-slinging by newspapers in Germany and England continued into 1937. From London, Ribbentrop cautioned the Führer that the war of words “is spoiling every hope of peace and promoting hatred in both countries."[11] Hitler, unwilling to leave the “bottomless effrontery” of the English media unanswered, ordered German journalists to resume discussing the previously blacked-out subject of the Reich’s stolen colonies. This would unsettle the English, who had acquired three quarters of Germany’s African territory after World War I.[12] Britain introduced a massive rearmament program early in 1937 to triple military capabilities. Hitler commented that he had expected “nothing less."[13]

Hitler temporarily halted the anti-English press campaign in November 1937. This was to establish a more congenial atmosphere before the visit of the British statesman Lord Halifax. At the *Berghof*, Halifax told Hitler he had come to discuss major differences between London and Berlin. The Führer replied only that he was unaware of such differences. His visitor cited National Socialism’s antagonism toward the church. Hitler parried

that the USSR pursues far more repressive measures against religious institutions, without any objection from England. Halifax changed the subject to Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Danzig. He advised his host that any change in their status must be accomplished peacefully. Hitler merely replied that these issues have nothing to do with London.

Halifax inquired about Germany's colonial aspirations, suggesting that Britain might be prepared to offer certain Portuguese territories in Africa. Hitler tactfully reminded him that Germany was only interested in the colonies taken away at Versailles. The Führer further recommended that England adopt a neutral position regarding territorial revisions in Europe, instead of "creating difficulties for no reason at all beyond pure malice."[14] The British envoy returned to London without having mended any fences.

In May 1937, Chamberlain became Britain's prime minister. An advocate of rearmament, he was a disciple of traditional balance-of-power diplomacy. He described Germany as "the chief cause of war scares in Europe."[15] At this time, Commonwealth nations helped determine British policy. The government could no longer make arbitrary decisions affecting the Empire without mutual consultation. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa considered the maritime powers Japan and Italy a greater threat to their interests than Germany. At the Empire Conference in July 1937, the dominions urged London to assist Hitler in revising the Versailles system. They warned England not to count on their assistance should she enter an armed conflict in Europe. South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts had already recommended that the British government stop treating Germany "like a pariah in Europe."[16]



Lord Halifax (left) with the secretary for war, Leslie Hore-Belisha. Halifax told the cabinet that Poland had greater military potential than the Soviet Union and would be a better ally for England.

Chamberlain faced a dilemma: To enforce the provisions of the Versailles treaty, which the English themselves compromised by concluding the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement, could bring Britain and Germany to blows. Such a policy would disregard the temperate influence of the dominions and adversely affect the cohesion of the Commonwealth. On the other hand, to allow Hitler a free hand would lead to German hegemony in Europe and upset the balance of power.

The formula for defeating German ambitions while simultaneously bringing the British Commonwealth, and for that matter the English public, aboard was as follows: block revisions most vital to Germany, yet

feign a willingness to make concessions. Superficial compromises would publicly demonstrate Chamberlain's desire for peace, thereby defusing German propaganda. Halifax's 1937 mission to Germany helped satisfy the dominions that Britain was willing to negotiate. Chamberlain privately confided to the American Henry Morgenthau that he needed to buy time to achieve "military superiority."[17]

During the Czech crisis in 1938, many British believed that Hitler was prepared to go to war to settle his differences with Prague. Chamberlain told Daladier in April that Britain's arms program, somewhat neglected from 1925 to 1935, was just getting under way again. Only when this program was complete, he explained, could England wage war anew.[18] In July, Chamberlain asked Arthur Robinson of the Supply Board when their country would be in a position to fight the Germans. Robinson answered, "In a year."[19] As England's former treasurer, Chamberlain knew well that an accelerated rearmament agendum would adversely impact English exports and unduly strain the economy.[20] Regarding Czechoslovakia, war was therefore not an option.

Chamberlain remained influential in continental affairs by sending Viscount Walter Runciman to Prague on August 3 to help mediate the crisis. French and Czech observers were skeptical. The French diplomat Rene Massigili told the Czechoslovakian ambassador in Paris, Stefan Osusky, that the English "know it will come down to war and are trying everything to delay it. . . . Gaining time plays a significant if not decisive role in sending Lord Runciman to Prague. Sir Arthur Street (undersecretary in the British Air Ministry) said he will have the English air force ready in six months."[21]

Negotiating the Sudetenland's transfer to Germany during talks with Hitler in September, Chamberlain suffered the rebuke of political rivals in his own country. His primary critics, Churchill and Eden, lacked detailed knowledge of Britain's military unpreparedness available to the prime minister. Chamberlain had in fact postponed a war England could not yet fight. He gained the approval of the English public, the dominions, and even the people of Germany for his efforts to sustain peace. Furthermore, he parried German propaganda's charge that Britain was attempting to encircle Germany with enemies.[22]

One who saw rearmament as a factor was Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London. He wrote Paris that the British wish “to avoid at all costs the reproach that in case a conflict breaks out and England becomes compelled to declare herself against Germany, she had not done everything to allay the fear of encirclement which Hitler has emphasized in the course of the last few months. Only in this way does she expect to gain the unanimous acceptance of the British public, which is indispensable for mobilizing all forces of the country."[23]

Less than a week after signing the Munich Accord, Chamberlain announced an increase in armaments spending from £400 million to £800 million per annum, the planned construction of 11,000 new combat aircraft over the next 14 months, and the formation of 19 more army divisions.[24] This must have been welcome news to Britain’s foreign secretary. According to the minutes of the September 25, 1938, cabinet session, Lord Halifax “felt some uncertainty about the ultimate end which he wished to see accomplished, namely the destruction of Nazism.” Halifax also speculated that if Hitler “was driven to war the result might be to help bring down the Nazi regime."[25]

The anti-German tenor of the British press did not abate. The parliamentary war party placed increasing pressure on Chamberlain. The German media was not shy in response. It quoted the *New York Times* of May 9, 1938, reporting on a speech by Churchill in Manchester: “Churchill proposes encircling Germany."[26] According to one German journalist, the British believed that “without a two-front war against Germany . . . a war is not winnable for England."[27]

Anglo-French newspapers repeatedly censured Hitler for alleged war scares. The English also provided some of their own. On December 6, 1938, their deputy ambassador in Berlin, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, warned the British Foreign Office that the German air force is preparing to bomb London. A German staff officer supposedly leaked Hitler’s secret plan to a member of the British mission in a Berlin park after dark.[28] No such operation was in fact even contemplated, nor was the Luftwaffe yet equipped for one. This air strike, the British reasoned, would be a prelude to a German invasion of Holland. Although there was no tangible evidence of this impending attack, the Foreign Policy Committee and the English

chiefs of staff conducted serious deliberations regarding countermeasures. Halifax notified British embassies abroad that the Foreign Office has “definite information” substantiating Kirkpatrick’s story.[29]

The cabinet met on February 1, 1939. Chamberlain stirred Switzerland into the pot, remarking that a German invasion there “would be clear evidence of an attempt to dominate Europe by force."[30] The cabinet discussed planning a war against Germany *and* Italy, even though the two countries were not yet allies. Topics included involving the Dutch and Belgian general staffs in joint defense talks. Cadogan summarized in the meeting’s minutes, “I agree that in the event of a German invasion of Holland resisted by the Dutch, we should go to war with Germany. There could appear some doubt about the position in the event the Dutch not resisting. For my part, I should say that in this case too we should go to war with Germany"[31] The attitude of the “threatened” nation apparently played no role. Decisive was the fact that the Foreign Policy Committee defined German military control over Holland as a peril to *England's* security.

Kirkpatrick’s “Holland scare” did not alarm the Dutch and Belgian governments. Holland’s foreign minister noted no German troop movements near the frontier. His Belgian colleague declined London’s offer for military talks, replying that he cannot believe the Germans intend to invade Holland.[32] Chamberlain exploited the rumors of a German attack to step up arms production. The English significantly reinforced their air defenses. That the British government and normally well-informed Foreign Office could base allegations of such far-reaching war preparations on Kirkpatrick’s insubstantial story, suggests that Hitler was offering little in the way of genuine, exploitable war scares to publicly justify such measures.

In March, Berlin negotiated a commercial agreement with Bucharest. In exchange for favorable options to purchase grain and oil, the Germans proposed sending engineers to Rumania to reorganize the agrarian economy and build modern refineries to boost oil production. The arrangement was advantageous to both countries. It corresponded to Hitler’s program to release Germany from dependency on overseas

markets. He himself stated, "I don't want free trade, open borders. That all sounds wonderful. But we've had it if everything depends on the queen of the waves, if we're subject to a blockade."[33]

Chamberlain's cabinet discussed developments in Bucharest at the session on March 18, 1939. The prime minister described Germany's economic talks as a "threat to Rumanian independence."[34] With military advisors present, the cabinet speculated that German domination of Rumanian trade would augment the Reich's political influence in the Balkans. This could spread to Greece and Turkey, endangering Britain's position in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Under these circumstances, the cabinet had to decide whether Germany's economic advantages from the trade agreement with Bucharest warrant the need for Britain to "take action."[35] The aide-mémoire prepared for the meeting by the minister for coordination and defence stated that England's only recourse was to start a war in the West. The cabinet weighed armed aggression as an option to block a harmless economic compact between two European states.

The London *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* wrote only of imminent *German* aggression. This coincided with allegations by Virgil Tilea, a Rumanian diplomat in London. He claimed that the Germans were threatening to invade his country unless given complete control over her agriculture and industry.[36] The British ambassador in Bucharest, Reginald Hoare, urged Halifax to quash the lurid publicity about Hitler's ultimatum: "There was not a word of truth in it." Hoare added that the Rumanian foreign minister, Grigorie Gafencu, assured him that negotiations with Germany were "on completely normal lines as between equals."[37] Chamberlain read Hoare's telegram aloud at the March 18 cabinet session. This report, together with the fact that Rumania is nearly 300 miles from Germany, did not discourage him from telling the Foreign Policy Committee that Rumania is "most probably the next victim of a German aggression."[38] The American emissary in Bucharest, Franklin Gunther, dismissed Tilea as an "Anglophile." In his diary, Cadogan ventured that Tilea probably collaborated with advisors in the British Foreign Office to insure that "panic was artificially raised."[39]

That same week, Czechoslovakia imploded and the German army

occupied the Czech portion. The British initially reacted with indifference; Ambassador Newton in Prague had forewarned them of the irreconcilable Slovak-Czech dissonance.[40] The Foreign Office had also predicted eventual German "domination" of Prague.[41] On March 15, Halifax notified Ribbentrop that "His Majesty's Government have no desire to interfere in a matter with which other governments may be more directly concerned."[42] At the cabinet session in London that day, ministers agreed that "this renewed rift between the Czechs and the Slovaks showed that we nearly went to war last autumn on behalf of a state which was not viable."[43]

Ribbentrop correctly observed that German military intervention in Prague offered England a credible alibi for war preparations. Speaking in Birmingham just two days later, Chamberlain asked, "Is this in fact a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?"[44] Though informed of the genuine causes of Czechoslovakia's collapse, Halifax attributed it solely to "German military action."[45] Even though the Bank of England remitted £6,000,000 in Czech gold reserves to the German administration in Prague,[46] Halifax condemned its new administration as "devoid of any basis of legality" – an indication of the legitimacy English leaders still attached to the Versailles system.[47]

Chamberlain accused Hitler of a "breach of faith." The prime minister cited the document both statesmen had signed in Munich on September 30, 1938, pledging to discuss matters of mutual concern before taking action, and the Führer's assurance that the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand in Europe. Hitler had supposedly broken his word, since he had promised in a Berlin speech last September 26 that he had no further interest in the Czech state after Munich. The September 30 document Chamberlain referred to reads, "We are resolved that the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries."[48] The German text of the agreement translates to the verb *betreffen* – "affect" – for the English word "concern." From Hitler's standpoint, his arrangement with Hacha did not affect England, hence no consultation was required.

As for the Berlin speech, Hitler said word for word, "I assured him that from the moment that Czechoslovakia resolves her other problems; that

means, when the Czechs have come to an arrangement with their minorities peacefully and without using force, then I am no longer interested in the Czech state. And I for my part will guarantee it."[49] Hitler made his disinterest in the Czechs and guarantee of their sovereignty contingent on the solution of the country's minority issues. He in no sense broke his word to Chamberlain. As for the British government's genuine (and unpublicized) reaction to the events in Prague, Halifax confided to the cabinet, "It had brought to a natural end the somewhat embarrassing commitment of a guarantee in which we and the French had both been involved."[50]

During the March 18 cabinet meeting, Chamberlain's ministers agreed that it would not be possible to protect Rumania without an ally in the East. With the Czechs neutralized, the prime minister saw Poland as "the key to the situation."[51] He proposed asking the Poles whether they were prepared to join ranks with the countries "threatened by German aggression."[52] The minutes of the meeting two days later reveal the extent of the cabinet's trifling concern for Polish independence: "The real issue was if Germany showed signs that she intended to proceed with her march for world domination, we must take steps to stop her by attacking her on two fronts. We should attack Germany not in order to save a particular victim but in order to pull down the bully."[53] On March 24, the day the Germans signed the trade agreement with Rumania, Halifax met with U.S. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy. Kennedy reported to the State Department that Halifax "felt the inevitability of war sooner or later should be met right now."[54]

With no evidence whatsoever, Halifax told the cabinet on March 30 that "plans have been prepared by Germany for a number of adventures including an attack on Poland."[55] At this time Hitler strove for a peaceful settlement, offering the Poles generous concessions in exchange for Danzig's return to the Reich and permission to construct an Autobahn across the corridor. Chamberlain said he was "somewhat uneasy at the fact that our ambassador in Warsaw could obtain no information as to the progress of the negotiations between Germany and Poland. One possible, *but very distasteful*, explanation of this was that Polish negotiators were in fact giving way to Germany"[56] (in other words, becoming receptive to

compromise).

Chamberlain stated that if the Poles consider the Danzig issue “a threat to their independence and were prepared to resist by force then we should have to come to their help.” Asked whether there was “a distinction between the seizure of Danzig by Germany and a German attack on the rest of Poland,” Halifax told the chancellor of the Exchequer that it was up to the Poles to decide.[57] First clearing it with Polish Foreign Minister Beck, Chamberlain announced Britain’s commitment to Poland in Parliament the next day. London’s guarantee of Polish sovereignty, differing little from a military alliance, drew Warsaw into the English camp just as German-Polish negotiations were entering the critical phase.

The British government publicly defined the purpose of its guarantee as to protect Poland from possible German aggression. Privately, the Foreign Office cabled its Paris ambassador on April 1 that there is “no official confirmation of the rumors of any projected attack on Poland and they must not therefore be taken as accepting them as true."[58] The English invited Beck to London for discussions.

On April 3, the Foreign Office distributed its confidential “Brief for Colonel Beck’s Visit.” It defined objectives for the next day’s talks. It described Danzig as “an artificial structure, the maintenance of which is a bad casus belli.” The brief speculated that “it is unlikely that the Germans would accept less than a total solution of the Danzig question.” The text then reveals the genuine priority of the Foreign Office: “Such a corrupt bargain would, however, have many disadvantages for England. It would shake Polish morale, increase their vulnerability to German penetration and so defeat the policy of forming a bloc against German expansion. It should not therefore be to *our interest* to suggest that the Poles abandon their rights in Danzig on the ground that they are not defensible."[59]

Beck took the bait. As William Strang of the Foreign Office summarized, “Both sides agreed that the occupation of Danzig by German armed forces would be a clear threat to Polish independence and that it would bring our assurance into operation."[60] On April 17, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes relayed from Berlin a conversation he had with a Polish journalist

acquainted with Poland's Ambassador Lipski. The journalist told the British diplomat that according to Lipski, good prospects for resolving the Danzig issue had existed prior to March 31. With the English guarantee however, Beck had decided to reject Berlin's offer even if the Germans limit it to Danzig. Ogilvie-Forbes added that information from other emissaries in Berlin confirmed the journalist's statement.[61]

Representatives of the French and the British general staffs met for a ten-day conference in London on April 24. They debated Anglo-French military cooperation in North African and Far Eastern colonies, along sea lanes and in Gibraltar, Singapore, and other strong-points against Germany, Italy and Japan. The publicly announced purpose of the conference, the defense of Poland, was not discussed.[62] For the English it was a matter of preparing a global confrontation against commercial rivals.

Throughout these months, Hitler strove to improve relations with London. In a nationally broadcast speech on January 30, 1939, he asked, "What conflicts of interest exist between England and Germany? I have declared more often than necessary, that there is no German and especially no National Socialist who even in his thoughts wants to create difficulties for the English world empire. . . . It would be a blessing for the whole world if these two peoples could cooperate in full confidence with one another."[63] After Chamberlain announced the British guarantee to Poland, Hitler recognized the influence England exercised on Warsaw's refusal to compromise. He therefore appealed directly to the British to enter negotiations.

On March 31, a Mr. Bellenger, Member of Parliament (MP), asked Chamberlain in the House of Commons how the government planned to respond to Hitler's appeal. The prime minister answered, "No negotiations are at present contemplated with the German government." Another MP, Arthur Henderson, received the same reply. Pressed again about entering talks with Germany by the MP Mr. Pilkington, Chamberlain repeated the formula response and concluded, "I have nothing to add."[64]

Halifax received an embassy report on April 23 that Hitler wished to meet with an "especially prominent British personality" fluent in German for a "man-to-man" conversation to reach an understanding with England.

Two weeks later Sir Francis Freemantle, a renowned physician and conservative MP unaware of Hitler's request, suggested sending the former prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, to meet with the Führer. Halifax replied to Freemantle, "At the moment unfortunately Hitler shows no disposition to receive an Englishman or even to discuss outstanding questions with us."[65] This was a plain lie.

Paris and London concluded a military convention with Warsaw on May 19. The French pledged that should Germany invade Poland or "threaten" Danzig (which was still a German city), their air force would strike immediately, and their army would mount a limited attack three days after mobilization. A major offensive would follow in twelve days. General Gamelin privately cautioned the French defense committee that the army could not launch a full-scale operation for at least two years.[66] The British General Ironside noted in his diary, "The French have lied to the Poles in saying they are going to attack. There is no idea of it." The British and French general staffs had already agreed that the "major strategy would be defensive."[67]

Nevile Henderson advised the Foreign Office in May that the "blank cheque given by His Majesty's Government to Poland" is obstructing a "compromise solution" to Danzig.[68] William Strang noted in a memo, "It is probably impossible at this hour for any British Cabinet Minister to take any step that would appear to be a satisfaction of German ambitions at the expense of Poland; on the other hand, such a step may be the only thing that can avert war. This is our terrible dilemma."[69] The English decided "to let the Poles play their own hand in this question,"[70] while acknowledging that this would probably bring Poland and Germany to blows, even though the cabinet had agreed in its May 25 session that "German claims in Danzig did not go beyond what we ourselves had thought would constitute a reasonable settlement three years ago."[71]

In June, Cadogan's secretary Jebb returned from an official visit to Warsaw. He told the Foreign Office that were England "to wiggle out of the guarantee," Poland would seriously revise its present position regarding Germany.[72] This was a tacit admission that the British guarantee was responsible for the Poles' refusal to negotiate with Germany. On the 16th, the Foreign Office cabled Ambassador Kennard in Warsaw, "You have

the discretion to inform Colonel Beck if suitable opportunity offers that the preparatory measures we had in mind were progressive, mobilization measures of all three services."[73] Notifying Beck of the good progress of Britain's war preparations could only reinforce his resolve to defy Germany.

The assistant undersecretary of the Foreign Office, Sargent, speculated on July 4, 1939, "We cannot as matters stand at present expect Hitler to negotiate with us unless in advance we make him a firm offer of one or other of the two things which he wants from us, i.e. either the return of full sovereignty of all the German colonies or their equivalent, or the *abandonment of the policy of encirclement* by cancelling our guarantees to Poland, Rumania, and Turkey and by dropping our treaty with Russia."[74] As Strang summarized with resignation, "The truth is that there is a fundamental irreconcilability between German and British policy."[75]

"One's objective should be...a war in which Germany's aggressiveness should be patent to all the world including the Germans themselves."[76] These words, which Henderson cabled to the Foreign Office on May 12, 1939, define Britain's propaganda goal for the approaching conflict. Denouncing Hitler for pushing toward war and lauding Chamberlain's supposed endeavors to salvage peace, the British hoped to drive a wedge between the German people and their leadership. "England's proven policy toward Germany," a Berlin journalist wrote, "shuns no means to bring the Reich again into a state of impotence and international bondage. This is what England regards today as ideal for diffusing power in Europe."[77] For Henderson, the manner of presenting Britain's case was crucial, "If we are ever to get (the) German army and nation to revolt against the intolerable government of Herr Hitler."[78]

The British continued to avoid direct conversations with Germany. In mid-August, the Foreign Office noted once more, "Herr Hitler would like to have a secret conversation, presumably of a general character with a German-speaking Englishman."[79] Halifax wrote Chamberlain on August 14, "We are considering the idea of getting someone who speaks German to go and talk to Hitler, but apart from the difficulty of finding the individual, I find it a bit difficult to imagine what he would say. In as much as Hitler's whole line of thought seems to be the familiar one of the

free land in the East on which he can settle Germans to grow wheat, I confess I don't see any way of accommodating him."[80] Even for someone with as mediocre a public career as Lord Halifax, it seems unlikely that after four months, no one suitable could be found by the Foreign Office who speaks German, or that the foreign secretary could fail to grasp that the pivotal issue was not farming.

Henderson was among the few in the Foreign Office opposed to war. He suggested on August 18 sending General Ironside, fluent in German, to Hitler with a personal letter discussing the British position regarding Danzig and Poland. London rejected the idea: “In view of our undertaking to Poland it is almost inconceivable that we could give such a promise to Germany and the effect of such a promise on our negotiations with our actual and potential allies would be catastrophic."[81]

On August 24, Henderson warned his superiors in London that there is “no longer any hope of avoiding war unless the Polish Ambassador is instructed to apply . . . for a personal interview with Hitler."[82] At the cabinet session that day, the ministers agreed to take no steps to pressure Poland to negotiate with Germany.[83] Chamberlain was back in Parliament within hours, falsely maintaining that the Poles were “ready at any time to discuss the differences with Germany."[84] Halifax contributed to the prime minister’s policy of mendacity two days later, telling the Polish ambassador in London, Edward Raczynski, “Hitler has not given the slightest indication of what he sees as the solution to the German-Polish problem."[85]

In another effort to compromise with Britain, the Führer discussed proposals with Henderson at the *Berghof* on August 25. The same afternoon, London formally ratified its treaty with Poland. According to Dahlerus, the Swedish businessman helping mediate the crisis, the Germans regarded England’s pact “as a flagrant challenge and a clear statement that she does not want a peaceful resolution."[86]

Publicly, Halifax claimed that his office was “ready to assist” in promoting direct conversations between Berlin and Poland. On August 28, he sent Kennard instructions to ask Beck whether he is ready to negotiate with Germany. Kennard was to reassure Beck that the British are not

necessarily recommending a compromise, and still stand behind Poland.[87] In this way, Halifax publicly gave the impression that London and Warsaw were prepared to enter talks with the Germans to avoid an armed confrontation. In Berlin, Lipski had previously cabled Beck that "Henderson told me, took the stand that we should abstain from any conversation with the Reich."[88]

Without consulting England, the Polish government declared general mobilization on August 30. The British cautioned Warsaw that the measure will appear to the international community that Poland is set on war.[89]The *Daily Telegraph* pointed out that the Poles have not honored their expressed willingness to negotiate with Germany, but instead called up their armed reserves. The British government immediately confiscated the entire edition. The revised issue which hit the newsstands deleted mention of Poland's mobilization.[90]

Trusting in Britain's offer to mediate, Hitler read his 16-point Mareinwerder proposals to Henderson. Göring furnished the ambassador with a copy of the document to forward to London. Halifax instructed Kennard to inform Beck that Germany has accepted an English suggestion about a five-power guarantee as a basis for direct Polish-German talks. Instead of disclosing Hitler's Marienwerder overture however, Halifax wrote, "it looks as though the German Government is working on new proposals."[91]

The Marienwerder points were so moderate that were war to break out, Halifax feared it may be difficult to sell the British, French and American public on the argument that Hitler is forcing Poland to the wall with unreasonable demands. Henderson urged London to keep the proposals out of the press.[92] According to Lady Diane Duff-Cooper, wife of the former first lord of the Admiralty, her husband was "horrified" upon learning of how modest Germany's proposals were. He telephoned the editors of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* and asked them to comment on the Marienwerder plan as negatively as possible.[93] Cadogan fumed in his diary, "They aren't proposals at all and the most impudent document I have ever seen."[94]

Hitler insisted to the English on August 30 that Poland must send an

emissary to Berlin authorized to negotiate. Halifax cabled Henderson, “We cannot advise Polish Government to comply with this procedure which is wholly unreasonable."[95] Frank Roberts in the Foreign Office remarked, “It is of course unreasonable to expect that we can produce a Polish representative in Berlin today. . . . So outrageous was Hitler’s demand that it was not even forwarded to Warsaw until twenty-four hours later."[96] The next day, Henderson sent Ogilvie-Forbes to the Polish embassy to show Lipski the Marienwerder proposals. Dahlerus accompanied Ogilvie-Forbes. Dahlerus read Lipski the 16 points, describing them as a reasonable basis for an honorable settlement. His host remained unmoved, saying the terms are “out of the question."[97]



Nevile Henderson (left) flew from Berlin to London and back toward the end of August in a last-ditch attempt to reconcile British and German differences without bloodshed.

Returning to the British embassy with Ogilvie-Forbes, Dahlerus received Henderson’s permission to telephone Number 10 Downing Street, the prime minister’s office in London. Dahlerus stated on the line that the Marienwerder proposals “had been formulated in order to show how extremely anxious the Führer was to reach an agreement with Great Britain,” as Cadogan reported in a memo.[98] The Swede further blamed the Poles for “obstructing possibilities of negotiation.” With Europe only hours from war, Halifax responded by admonishing Henderson, “In the future please prevent persons not belonging to the English mission from using its telephone line."[99]

Throughout August, the English exerted none of their substantial influence over Poland to bring Warsaw to the conference table. Beck confided to U.S. Ambassador Anthony Biddle that he based Polish foreign policy on the orientation of the Western powers.[100] London's unconditional support encouraged Beck in his decision to defy and provoke Berlin. For their part, Halifax and Chamberlain were aware of the effect maintaining a potentially hostile military presence in Germany's flank would exercise on Hitler. According to a Foreign Office memo, aides "kept Halifax supplied with information which supported Henderson's line that Hitler was unlikely to risk his life's work on the throw of the dice of war, *unless he felt encircled."*[101]

Duff-Cooper's remark, "in Munich we lost 35 superbly equipped divisions" (referring to the Czech army), the Germans interpreted as proof of England's hostile intentions.[102] Had Chamberlain compelled the Poles to peacefully resolve the Danzig and minority issues with Hitler, then England would have lost Poland as an ally. The Polish diplomat Count Lubienski confessed that without Chamberlain's guarantee, "A settlement with Germany could very easily have been reached."[103]

On September 1, 1939, the German invasion of Poland began. On its second day, Hitler arranged through his foreign minister another appeal to England. He offered to withdraw his army from Poland and compensate the Poles for damages, if London would mediate the Danzig/corridor dispute.[104] Chamberlain's response was to declare war on Germany the next day. Allied with England, France followed suit. Halifax commented, "Now we have forced Hitler to war."[105]

On September 4, French and British military leaders, including Gamelin and Ironside, privately agreed not to launch an offensive against the Reich. They also decided against aerial bombardment, fearing German retaliation. At a session of the Inter-Allied Supreme War Council one week later, the same generals speculated that any significant military pressure on the Germans may cause them to transfer troops from Poland to fight in the West. Anxious to avoid such a development, Chamberlain summarized, "There is no hurry as time is on our side."[106]



The *Völkischer Beobachter* published this cartoon on October 28, 1939, depicting Chamberlain amid the ruins of Poland. He asked in the caption, "Does anyone else want English help?"

Norwid Neugebauer, chief of the Polish military mission in London, visited Ironside that same week to solicit aid for his beleaguered nation. The British general, "short of time," terminated the interview.[107] The German army overran Poland in three weeks. Entering exile in Rumania, Marshal Rydz-Smigly declared that he never should have trusted the assurances of the Allies. Polish President Moscicki acknowledged that Poland should have accepted Germany's offer.[108]

Hitler looked beyond the immediate, localized perspective of the conflict with Britain. He privately remarked, "England doesn't see that the distribution of power in the world has changed. Europe no longer means

'the world.' Major blocs have formed. Their dimensions are clearly recognizable. They stand outside of the individual European states and any possible combination of 'balance' alliances. Only a unified Europe can assert itself amid this world of blocs."[109]

In Hitler's view, the balance of power had shifted from Europe to the entire globe. The former German army officer Heinrich Jordis von Lohausen summarized that by 1900, England's Royal Navy and Germany's continental army had already represented an unbeatable combination: "A prerequisite for Europe's undisputed supremacy in the world was that the pair never turned against one another."[110] Throughout the pre-war years, Hitler had regarded Anglo-German friendship as indispensable for maintaining European world leadership. The failure of this foreign policy objective led to the continent's abdication as pioneer and steward of civilization, a role it had discharged for centuries with prudence, authority and majesty.

The Unwelcome Alliance

In 1989, in the bleak remoteness of the southern Ural mountain range, Russian archeologists excavated an abandoned gold mine near Chelyabrinsk. Unlike members of related crafts in other countries, they were not digging for prehistoric fossils or for evidence of ancient settlements. Some 300,000 corpses ultimately exhumed from the mine were victims of Soviet purges. Discovery of another mass burial site near Minsk yielded the remains of 102,000 more, including a large number of women.[111] Archeologists uncovered nearly 50,000 bodies at an isolated grave site between Chabarovsk and Vladivostok, plus 46,000 buried around Gorno-Altaisk, Bykovnya, and St. Petersburg.

Stalin and the Politburo employed mass executions to crush public opposition to their program to transform Russia's agrarian economy into one based on heavy industry. Industrialization was a prerequisite for remolding the Red Army into a modern, mechanized strike force capable of supporting Communist revolutions abroad through direct intervention. Moscow financed the purchase of the required military technology and machinery from the United States and Weimar Germany by exporting timber and grain. It brought huge quantities of grain to market annually:

Soviet functionaries, aided by the state police, the NKVD, simply confiscated harvests from the rural population. Contemporary researchers estimate that the resulting famine claimed approximately a million lives in southern Russia and in the northern Caucasus region, another million in Kasachstan, and four million in the Ukraine.

In 1932, at the peak of this state-sponsored mass starvation, Stanislav Kosior, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, implored the Politburo to provide foodstuffs for the distressed populace. That June, Stalin personally wrote in response, “In my opinion, the Ukraine has received more than it is entitled to."[112]

The NKVD combated local resistance to Soviet “collectivism” through terror and mass arrests. Between May and September 1931, for example, it shipped 1,243,860 farmers and their family members to forced labor camps called gulags, sited in remote and inhospitable regions such as northern Siberia. Over 40 percent of those deported were children. In May 1935, Soviet records listed 1,222,675 people confined to gulags, almost all of whom had been farmers.[113] A large percentage of them subsequently perished from disease, hunger and the cold. Those who had fought back, labeled “saboteurs” or “counter-revolutionaries” in Communist jargon, the NKVD dealt with less mercifully. It arrested an estimated 20 million people from 1935 to 1941, seven million of whom suffered summary execution. In October/November 1937, during a five-night period, the Leningrad NKVD deputy Matveev, assisted part-time by another official, personally shot 1,100 inmates.[114]

Like democracy, Communism was an ideology for export: The Soviet economist Joseph Davidov stated in 1919, “Not peace, but the sword will carry the dictatorship of the proletariat to the world.” Marshal Tukhachevsky wrote in 1920, “The war can only end with the establishment of a worldwide proletarian dictatorship.” The USSR’s secret police chief, Felix Dzerzhinski, announced, “We're starting to take over the entire world without concern for the sacrifices we must make.” The senior Soviet official Karl Radek remarked, “We were always in favor of revolutionary wars. . . . A bayonet is a very important thing and indispensable for introducing Communism.” Stalin himself said this to a graduating class of Red Army officer cadets: “The Soviet Union can be compared to a savage, predatory beast, concealed in ambush in order to

lure his prey in and then pounce on him with a single leap."[115]



The Red Army on parade at the Kremlin, circa 1936. Stalin assigned priority to expansion and modernization of the armed forces.

Hitler had no illusions about the Soviet threat. His party membership included German army veterans who had served on the eastern front during World War I and had witnessed the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Testimony of refugees and reports from diplomatic missions inside Russia provided ample evidence of Soviet intentions and methods. Lenin had publicly stated that the key to Europe's domination was controlling Germany. The Comintern, Moscow's international organization for subversion and revolution, assigned priority to the German Reich and to China. At the Communist party congress in January 1934, Stalin told delegates, "The war will not just take place on the front lines, but in the enemy's hinterland as well."[116] Hitler made protecting Germany from Soviet aggression the cornerstone of his foreign policy. In so doing, he encountered resistance from the German aristocracy; a stratum ironically near the top of Marxism's hit list.

Less wealthy than its social counterpart in England, Germany's titled class dominated the army's leadership cadre and the foreign office. Both contributed to an era of Soviet-German cooperation that began with

ratification of the Rapallo Treaty in 1922. War Minister Otto Gessler negotiated an agreement with Moscow enabling the Germans to build factories inside the USSR to design, manufacture, and test weapons forbidden the Reich by the Versailles system. The Junkers aeronautic firm developed new combat aircraft there without the knowledge of the Western democracies, thus avoiding retaliatory sanctions. A secret military compact in 1923 arranged for German pilots to participate in six-month flight instruction courses in Soviet air academies. Russian engineers learned how to construct aircraft assembly plants from Junkers.[117] German general staff officers sent to the Soviet Union helped modernize the Red Army, by schooling its commanders in strategic operations and logistics.

During the 1920s, the prominent German industrialist Arnold Rechberg strengthened ties with French and Belgian heavy industry in order to develop an anti-Soviet economic bloc. The German army thwarted his endeavors. In 1926, the Soviet and German governments expanded the Rapallo Treaty through the Berlin Agreement. This was primarily a safeguard against Poland, and corresponded to the anti-Polish tendency in the Reich's Foreign Office and in the Soviet hierarchy. Many German career diplomats advocated Bismarck's previous policy of maintaining good relations with Russia.

In 1933, the German ambassador in Moscow, Rudolf Nadolny, presented the newly appointed Chancellor Hitler with a memorandum arguing the merits of an Eastern orientation over a pro-Western policy. He pleaded his case to the Führer in a personal interview. Throughout the Weimar period of superficial cooperation, however, the Comintern had worked hand-in-hand with the Communist Party of Germany to provoke a revolution. Hitler rejected Nadolny's proposal explaining, "I want nothing to do with these people."[118] The chancellor favored formation of a central European bloc to check Soviet expansion, with England and France covering its back. During Hitler's first year in office, covert military cooperation with the Red Army came to an end. Germany continued to trade with the USSR, extending a credit of RM 200 million in March 1935 to purchase German industrial machinery, but the Führer forbade the export of military hardware to Stalin's empire.

Neither France nor England displayed interest in Hitler's concept of an

alliance system to check Soviet expansion. Paris concluded a pact with the USSR in May 1935. After their Pyrrhic victory in World War I, the English realized that they were too weak to prevent German hegemony in Europe. A two-front war, requiring the support of the Soviet Union, offered a better prospect for destroying their commercial rival in central Europe. In 1935 Vansittart, then permanent undersecretary in the British Foreign Office, emphasized the “great importance” of amalgamating British and Soviet objectives. He later cautioned his colleagues, “For us Englishmen Russia is in all respects a much less dangerous member of the international community than Germany."[119] London’s courtship of the Kremlin led Stalin to relax the Comintern’s subversive propaganda in British colonies. The Foreign Office concluded that Britain’s imperial interests were best secured by cooperation with Stalin.[120] The German diplomat Ribbentrop conceded, “No one in England wants to see the Communist danger."[121]

Meanwhile, Hitler saw an emerging Soviet threat in southwestern Europe. Since overthrowing the monarchy in 1931, the Spanish republic had been fighting for survival against internal extremists. In November 1934, Hitler received a report from Germany’s ambassador in Madrid, Count Johannes von Welczeck, which stated, “The systematic *Bolshevisation* of Spain carried on since the fall of the monarchy by the Communist-anarchist side represents a European danger. With the conquest of this flanking position, an important stage on the way to Communist world revolution will be reached, and central Europe will be threatened on two sides."[122] Conspiring with fascist radicals known as the Falange, the Spanish army attempted a coup to overthrow the republic in July 1936; the rebels considered the present government too weak to prevent a Communist take-over. They gained only partial control of the country, which plunged Spain into civil war.

The Reich’s Government at first limited itself to the evacuation by sea and air of some 10,000 Germans residing in Spain. The rebellion’s leader, General Francisco Franco, solicited Berlin’s aid to airlift Spain’s African army – comprising nearly 18,000 Spanish foreign legionnaires and 15,570 Moroccans – to the mainland.[123] The Spanish navy remained loyal to the republic and would not ferry these well-disciplined professional soldiers from Morocco to reinforce the rebels.

Although the republican government had been friendly to Germany, Hitler decided to help Franco. He told Ribbentrop that were the Communists to gain control of Spain, it would only be a “question of time” before France suffered the same fate. England, the Führer reasoned, was indifferent to these developments, and prominent French politicians advocated militarily assisting the republican forces which were saturated with Marxists. Germany would become “trapped between the powerful Soviet bloc in the east and a strong Communist, French-Spanish bloc in the west."[124] In a memorandum composed in August 1936 for top government officials, Hitler wrote, “Marxism, through its victory in Russia, has taken over one of the biggest empires in the world as a jumping-off point for further operations. This has become an ominous issue. A concentrated will to conquer, consolidated in an authoritative ideology, is assailing an inwardly divided democratic world."[125]

The Soviet Union contributed weapons and troops to reinforce the republican forces. Stalin opined that “in peacetime, it’s impossible to have a Communist movement in Europe that’s strong enough for a Bolshevik party to seize power. A dictatorship of this party will only be possible through a major war."[126] The Soviet defense minister, Kliment Voroshilov, stated that the purpose of the USSR’s commitment in Spain is to tie Hitler down in the West and weaken Germany militarily.[127] Over the next three years, 18,000 German soldiers, primarily air force personnel, fought in the Spanish Civil War. German Foreign Minister Neurath defined the deployment as defensive in nature, to prevent Spain “from falling under Bolshevik domination and infecting the rest of Western Europe.” Erhard Milch later remarked that exploiting the Spanish war as an opportunity to test new weapons “was neither discussed nor even thought of."[128] In April 1938, Hitler wanted to withdraw his troops to train new Luftwaffe units in Austria, but reluctantly had to keep them in action against the Soviet-backed republicans.



A Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter plane belonging to the Luftwaffe contingent in Spain during the civil war. The Germans painted Spanish fascist insignia on their aircraft.

Despite the indirect confrontation in Spain, the USSR began shifting its orientation from the Western democracies toward improving relations with Germany in 1937. The Soviet commerce representative, D. Kandelaki, conducted economic negotiations with the Germans. Eventually Schacht and Göring represented the Reich in these talks. Soviet Trade Commissioner Anastas Mikoyan participated as well. The Kremlin instructed Walter Krivizki, chief of the Soviet secret service for Western Europe, to suspend espionage within Germany in order to cultivate an atmosphere of confidence for the discussions.[129]

The Red Army remained a potent force in Germany's flank. Soviet arms expenditures in 1936 climbed from 6.5 billion rubles the previous year to 14.8 billion.[130] Stalin gradually discouraged London and Paris from pursuing an alliance with the USSR, extricating himself from his Western commitments by casting doubts on the Red Army's potential. In February 1937, he began receiving lists identifying leading military personnel and civil servants suspected of disloyalty. Of the 44,477 names appearing on the lists, Stalin ordered the execution without trial of 38,955.[131] In one day he condemned 3,167 people and that evening watched a movie. The victims had not been plotting against the regime, but served as scapegoats for the lack of progress in Stalin's program to modernize the Red Army. The purge of officers cost the Soviet army three of its five field marshals,

twelve of an original 14 army commanders, 60 of its 67 corps commanders, and 136 of 199 divisional commanders. All eight admirals lost their lives. Just ten members of the 108-man Military Council survived. Of the officers promoted to fill the leadership vacuum, 85 percent were younger than 35 years of age.[132]

Prior to this purge, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, had registered a healthy respect for the Red Army in Western circles. With the decimation of the officer corps sank the esteem of Russia's fighting forces among Allied statesmen. "Collective security," the cornerstone of Litvinov's policy to check Germany, collapsed.[133] Hitler benefited from the West's wavering confidence in the USSR's military value during its most vulnerable period, annexing Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938. He remained unwilling to mollify his position on the USSR. In a Reichstag speech on February 20, 1938, he said, "With one state we have not sought a relationship, nor do we wish to establish a closer association; Soviet Russia."[134]

Later that year, the Führer began to revise his policy. For five years, England and France had turned a cold shoulder to his appeal for friendship. The United States endorsed their strategy to isolate the Reich. Douglas Miller, attached to the U.S. embassy in Berlin, announced that trade negotiations with Germany "in the near future" were unlikely. The State Department declared "no commerce" with the Germans to be its official policy.[135]

The Reich imported 80 percent of its rubber, 60 percent of its oil, 65 percent of its iron ore, and 100 percent of its chrome. The last mineral was indispensable to make steel for armored vehicles and was purchased primarily from Turkey and South Africa. In the event of war, a British nautical blockade would disrupt deliveries. The situation was similar for most other strategic materials required by the Reich. Toward the end of 1938, German economists urged Hitler to resume commerce with the Soviets. The OKW maintained that only close economic cooperation with the USSR could offset the catastrophic effect of a blockade.[136]

Ribbentrop told his staff, "Unless we want to become completely encircled, we must talk now with the Russians."[137] Developments within

the USSR influenced Hitler's deliberations. Stalin's purge targeted not just the military, but the old Bolsheviks as well. Soviet propaganda simultaneously idealized traditional Russian national heroes such as Czar Peter the Great, Alexander Nevsky, and Aleksandr Suvorov, who had defeated the Turks in the late 18th Century. These circumstances the Germans interpreted as a shift in Soviet policy, from Communist internationalism to domestic patriotism. A nationalist Russia was a palatable ally for Hitler. In their endeavors to isolate Germany, the democracies drove him into Stalin's arms.

On March 10, 1939, Stalin delivered a foreign policy speech at the Communist party congress. He denounced Britain, France, and the United States for their press campaigns to incite Germany into a war against the Soviet Union. He defined his objective as "to observe events cautiously, without giving the war provocateurs, who are accustomed to letting others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them, the opportunity to drag our country into a conflict."[138] Ribbentrop noted, "This declaration by Stalin showed that he was thinking about a path to a German-Soviet understanding."[139] When the Germans marched into Prague a few days later, the Russians cooperated with Hitler's diplomatic restructuring of Bohemia/Moravia. In April, the German press discontinued criticism of the Soviet Union.

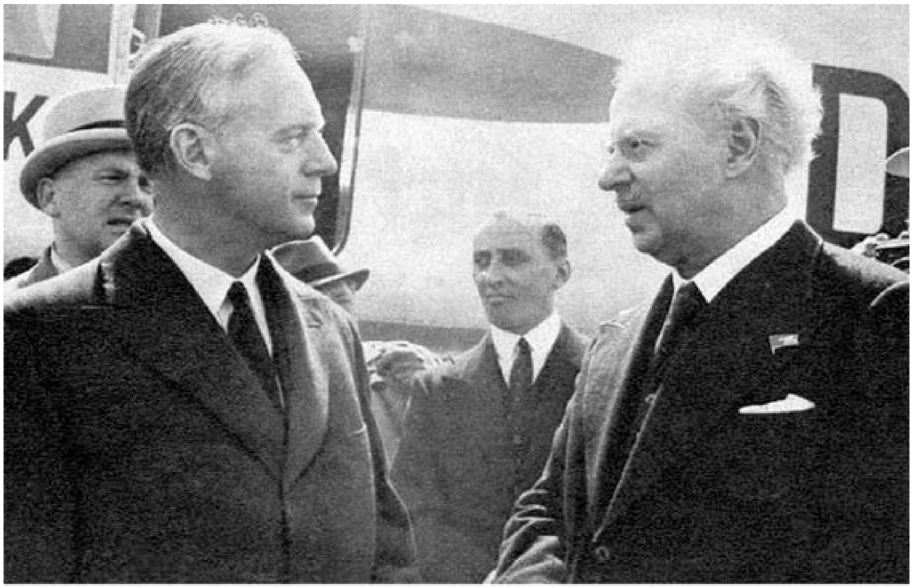
Hitler considered Stalin's dismissal of Litvinov on May 3, 1939, the decisive step toward rapprochement. As foreign affairs commissar, Litvinov had established diplomatic relations with the USA, brought the USSR into the League of Nations, concluded mutual assistance pacts with Czechoslovakia and France, and promoted an alliance system against Germany. Though Stalin himself ran foreign policy, the removal of the representative publicly associated with "collective security" was a gesture that impressed Hitler. On May 10, the Führer discussed the Soviet question with foreign policy advisors Gustav Hilger and Julius Schnurre. Hilger gave Hitler a detailed report on Moscow's endeavors for the last three years to improve relations. Less than a month before, for example, Soviet Ambassador Alexei Merekalov had told Weizsäcker that there was no reason not to normalize and consistently strengthen Soviet-German ties.[140] On May 9, the Russian diplomat Georgi Astachov had told Schnurre that Stalin was prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact with Germany.

He also thanked the Reich’s Foreign Office for recent “correct” press coverage of the Soviet Union.

On June 6, Berlin hosted a parade of German military personnel who had served in the Spanish Civil War. In his welcoming speech, Hitler avoided criticism of the “Bolshevik menace” which had threatened Spain. He denounced instead the Western democracies for mendacious news reporting: “For years, British and French newspapers lied to their readers, claiming Germany and Italy intended to conquer Spain, divide her up and especially steal her colonies. This way of thinking seems more natural to the representatives of these countries than to us, since robbing colonies is already among acceptable and practiced methods of the democracies."[141]

Around this time, Stalin conducted trade negotiations with Anglo-French delegates, not very sincerely but to indirectly pressure Germany to ally with the USSR. Hitler realized that cooperation with the Russians offered the best chance to tip the scales in his country’s favor. Were Moscow to join forces with the Western powers, the Reich would become economically and militarily encircled.

The Kremlin hosted an Anglo-French military delegation in August. At the conference, Voroshilov offered to commit 120 infantry divisions, 16 cavalry divisions and 10,000 tanks to invade Germany in the event of war. France’s General Joseph Doumenc and England’s Admiral Reginald Drax, second-rate negotiators with limited authority, proposed a more or less defensive strategy, a token commitment compared to what the Russians were pledging.[142] Voroshilov insisted that the alliance would be contingent on the Red Army’s right to cross Poland and Rumania to reach the German frontier. Since both these buffer states controlled territory taken from Russia in 1919, their governments justifiably feared that once allowed in, the Soviets would permanently occupy the borderline regions. Bucharest and Warsaw rejected the proposal and the talks failed. Moscow made no attempt to negotiate directly with the Poles to win their cooperation, an indication of Stalin’s blasé attitude toward a compact with the Allies.



Arriving at the Moscow airport on August 23, 1939, Ribbentrop (left) speaks with Vladimir Potemkin, deputy commissar for foreign affairs in the USSR.

That month, the USSR concluded an expansive trade agreement with the German Reich. On August 19, the new foreign affairs commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov, told the German ambassador, Count Friedrich von Schulenburg, “to insure the success of economic negotiations, a corresponding political basis must be created."[143] He proposed a non-aggression pact, something the Russians had first suggested to the Germans in July 1936. Hitler avoided the example of his Western adversaries, who had offended the Soviets by sending second-class representatives to the military talks in Moscow. He telegraphed to Stalin an offer to dispatch Ribbentrop himself. He stated, “The Reich’s foreign minister has full authority for the wording and signing of the non-aggression pact as well as the protocol."[144] Stalin replied on August 21, inviting Ribbentrop to fly to Moscow for a meeting on the 23rd.

Stalin personally participated in the conference. He demanded that Germany recognize the Baltic States, Finland and Bessarabia as Soviet spheres of interest. He promised his guest that the USSR did not wish to disturb the inner structure of these lands. Regarding Poland, Stalin recommended that the signatories fix a demarcation line in the event of war, to prevent German-Soviet friction when dividing the country. Ribbentrop reassured his host that the Reich’s new Soviet orientation represents a fundamental shift in foreign policy, and is not a tactical

maneuver to enable Germany to isolate and crush Poland. He assured Stalin, “From the German side, everything will be attempted to resolve the matter in a diplomatic and peaceful way."[145] On August 24, the German delegation flew back to Berlin with the signed pact. Hitler did not regard the treaty as a green light to attack Poland, but continued fruitless attempts at negotiation for another week.[146] With war under way in September, Ribbentrop cabled the German mission in Moscow to press the Soviets to occupy the eastern half of Poland according to the secret protocol. He hoped to draw the USSR into the war against England and France. Molotov stalled for two weeks. Stalin finally ordered the Red Army to advance on September 17. The Germans had already driven the Poles back 120 miles beyond the demarcation line. Stalin feared that Hitler’s troops would keep the additional territory instead of relinquishing it to Soviet forces. Upon Poland’s defeat, the German and Soviet armies staged a joint military parade in Brest-Litovsk.

Having eliminated Poland as a military threat, Hitler hoped to reach a compromise with England and France. He planned to offer to restore sovereignty to the Czech state and to Western Poland. Ribbentrop had advised the Soviet government of this intention in a note on September 15. At a conference with the OKW on October 17, Hitler stated, “Poland shall be made independent. It will not become part of the German realm nor be under the administration of the Reich."[147]

Two weeks later, Molotov expressed Moscow’s position on Poland: “Nothing is left of this miscarriage of the Versailles treaty, which owed its existence to the suppression of non-Polish nationalities.” Stalin sent a telegram to Ribbentrop on December 27, reminding him that “the friendship of the peoples of Germany and Soviet Union” has been “forged in blood” on the battlefields of Poland.[148] Any endeavor to resurrect the Polish state, Stalin pleaded, was therefore contrary to this spirit. Aware of his country’s dependency on Soviet trade, Hitler abandoned the plan to reestablish Polish statehood. Stalin sought to stifle any action that might bring Germany and the Allies to the conference table.

On November 30, 1939, the Red Army invaded Finland. The Finns did nothing to prompt the attack, beyond refusing Moscow’s demands to cede portions of their frontier territory and some islands in the Gulf of Finland

to the USSR. The Russians described their “counterattack” as a response to the “provocations of Finnish militarists."[149] The three-and-a-half month winter war that followed cost the Finnish army 27,000 dead and 55,000 wounded. The Red Army lost 126,875 killed in action and 264,908 wounded. Though German public opinion overwhelmingly favored Finland, Hitler blocked attempts by the Allies to deliver war materiel to the Finns via Norway.

The Führer personally penned an unattributed editorial defining the government’s position on Scandinavia, which the German press published early in December: “Since the establishment of the League of Nations, the northern states were the most loyal supporters of this system, whose only purpose was to perpetually tie down Germany. . . . When National Socialism took power in Germany, scarcely a day passed that many newspapers of the northern states did not vent their arrogant and insulting criticism of German policies. . . . It is naïve and sentimental to expect that the German people, fighting for their future, should presently side with these little countries that previously couldn't do enough to revile and discredit Germany."[150]

Fearing Anglo-French intervention, Stalin suspended operations in Finland in March 1940, just as his army had gained the upper hand. He demanded little more than the territories the USSR had sought to annex during negotiations with Helsinki the previous October. The Soviets soon dispelled any good will such mild terms evoked. Less than a week after concluding the peace treaty in Moscow, the Russians realized that the newly defined frontier left the town of Enso just inside the Finnish border. It was home to one of the world’s largest complexes for manufacture of paper and cellulose. The latter is a polymer necessary for producing high-grade explosives. The Red Army simply crossed into Finland and occupied Enso.[151]

On June 2, 1940, the Soviets demanded “restitution” for wares the Finns had allegedly evacuated during the fighting from areas now under Russian control. No provision for this compensation existed in the original Moscow treaty. Finland had to surrender 75 locomotives and 2,000 freight cars to the USSR. On June 14, Soviet fighters shot down a Finnish passenger plane flying French and American diplomats to Helsinki. The Soviets deported the entire population, 420,000 persons, from the part of

Finland now under their control.[152]



This Soviet poster idealizes the 1939 invasion of Karelia. It reads, "For a Red Petrograd! For a Red Finland!"

Soviet pressure on Finland became a German problem. In April 1940, Schnurre negotiated a trade agreement with Helsinki. It allowed the Reich to purchase 60 percent of Finnish nickel ore, necessary for steel production. Germany mined just five percent of her own nickel requirements. In June, the USSR insisted on the option to purchase a large amount of the Finnish output. Since the Soviet Union already enjoyed sufficient domestic production, the Germans viewed Moscow's initiative as a ploy to make the Reich more dependent on Russia for raw materials. Admiral Nikolai Nesvizki of the Soviet Baltic Sea fleet submitted a

confidential report on how “to solve the problem of the independent existence of Sweden and Finland."[153] The Soviets prepared plans for a renewed invasion of Finland in September.

The German-Finnish trade agreement, signed on June 24, made Finland an important source of natural resources for the Reich’s war industry. In August 1940, the OKW received intelligence about Soviet troop concentrations near the Finnish frontier. Upon Hitler’s orders, the Germans reinforced their army and Luftwaffe contingents in northern Norway. They gave the Finns the Allied ordnance originally intended for the winter war against Russia, which the German army had confiscated in Norwegian ports. Finland arranged to begin discreetly purchasing German weapons as well. During the winter of 1940/41, the Soviets broke a trade agreement with Helsinki and suspended grain deliveries to Finland. The Finns turned to Germany to fill the void, strengthening the bond between the two countries.

The USSR moved against the other countries which the 1939 German-Soviet pact defined as Soviet spheres of interest. Late that year, Moscow had pressured Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia to sign treaties permitting the Red Banner Fleet to establish naval bases in their Baltic ports. In June 1940, Molotov complained of insufficient protection for Russian military personnel stationed there. An ultimatum followed, forcing the governments of the three Baltic nations to allow the Soviets to reinforce the garrisons. The Red Army sent 18-20 divisions.[154] This overwhelming martial presence enabled Communists there to declare the Baltic countries Soviet republics on July 21, following sham elections and a “popular uprising.”



During Soviet sham elections in the Baltic countries in January 1941, a political commissar helps validate the identity of registered voters. The poster depicts Stalin and Molotov.

Stalin sent two representatives, Zdanov and Vysinskiy, to rid the territory of political undesirables. The Soviets deported over 140,000 Estonians, 155,000 Latvians, and 300,000 Lithuanians to Siberian labor camps. Scarcely any ever returned.[155] Referring to the USSR's occupation of the Baltic States and simultaneous seizure of Bessarabia from Rumania, Stalin told the Communist Party Central Committee in September 1940, "This is a blessing for humanity. The Lithuanians, White Russians, and Bessarabians whom we have liberated from oppression by landowners, capitalists, policemen, and similar scum consider themselves lucky. This is the people's attitude."[156]



Young Latvians march in the 1941 Soviet May Day parade. Their expressions indicate that participation in this celebration of "proletarian unity" was not exactly voluntary.

During these Soviet land grabs, world attention focused on Western Europe. In April 1940, the German armed forces occupied Norway and Denmark. The following month, the Germans invaded Holland, Belgium, and France, all three of which surrendered within six weeks. The British Expeditionary Force withdrew to England. Germany so smoothly vanquished her continental adversaries that Britain went over to the defensive. The protracted war of attrition Stalin had predicted would wear out the "capitalist" states did not materialize. The Reich's augmenting influence over the European economy partially relieved its dependency on Soviet trade. The rapid German victory unsettled Stalin, who expressed the opinion that war with Germany was inevitable.[157]

Soviet expansion disquieted Hitler, and Russian efforts to improve relations with England, still at war with Germany, compounded his suspicions. On April 23, 1940, Weizsäcker telegraphed Karl von Ritter, a secretary in the Germany embassy in Moscow, that "yesterday almost every London newspaper wrote about Soviet-English economic talks, supposedly started on Soviet initiative." Weizsäcker directed the German mission to inform Molotov, "with respect to the course so far of Soviet deliveries of raw materials, the Reich's Government is not satisfied that

they correspond to its perception of mutual assistance. It implores the Soviet government to increase and continue deliveries during the months favorable for transportation, and immediately get larger shipments of oil and grain in motion."[158] Moscow negotiated a trade agreement with London while simultaneously slackening on obligations to Germany.

The British ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps, conferred with Stalin in July. To win Russia for an anti-German alliance, Cripps promised that England would accept Soviet control over the Dardanelles, the Balkans, eastern Poland, and practically any arrangement for post-war Europe Stalin wanted.[159] Considering traditional British foreign policy, these were lavish concessions. The Soviet dictator confided that he considered Germany the only threat. He more or less opened the door to an alliance with London.

Aware that the conference with Cripps would arouse mistrust in Berlin, Stalin ordered Molotov to provide the German ambassador with a written summary of the talks. The Molotov version, which Schulungberg forwarded to his government, gave the impression that Stalin had remained loyal to the German alliance and rejected the Cripps proposals. However, Hitler received more reliable information from Rome; Italian agents were secretly monitoring the dispatches of the Yugoslavian ambassador in Moscow, Milan Gavrilovic, to Belgrade. This intelligence they relayed to Berlin. Gavrilovic wrote about Moscow's interest in signing with England. In this way, Hitler learned of Stalin's duplicity.[160]

Also during July, Hitler and Ribbentrop began mediating a border dispute between Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania. The Red Army massed along the common frontier with Rumania. It prepared to invade and "restore order" if war broke out among the Balkan States.[161] Reports of Soviet troop concentrations in Bessarabia induced Hitler to order two German armored divisions stationed in southwestern Poland, plus ten infantry divisions, to rapidly occupy the Rumanian oil fields at Ploesti in case the region became unstable.

On August 24, the Hungarian-Rumanian talks broke down. Hitler forced their diplomats back to the conference table. Germany's powerful economic influence in the region, together with justifiable fear of Soviet intervention, led them to accept the Führer's arbitration. At a session conducted by Ribbentrop and Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano in

Vienna on August 30, Rumania agreed to cede the northern part of Siebenbürgen to Hungary. In exchange, Germany and Italy guaranteed Rumania against foreign aggression. Upon Bucharest's request, the Germans dispatched a military mission including mechanized troops and air force units to train and upgrade the Rumanian army in October.[162]

Moscow had contributed to the crisis by attempting to provoke Hungary and Bulgaria against Rumania. The Kremlin now protested that the Vienna Arbitration violated Article II of the German-Soviet pact. The 1939 treaty required consultation in questions of mutual interest, but the Russians had not been invited to the negotiations in Vienna. Ribbentrop replied that Soviet interests in the Balkans had already been satisfied with the occupation of Bessarabia in June. He reminded Molotov that the USSR seized all of Lithuania, including a portion defined as a German sphere of influence, without notifying Berlin. Ribbentrop argued that German diplomatic intervention in the Balkan controversy had restored stability to a region bordering the Soviet Union, which could only be in Moscow's interests.

Molotov responded in a memorandum on September 21, 1940. He disputed Ribbentrop's position, complaining that the German-Italian guarantee for Rumania is directed against the USSR (its actual purpose was to protect Rumania from Hungary, whose regent was unsatisfied with the final arrangement). Although the Germans addressed Molotov in a manner the Rumanian foreign minister described as "well-meaning and conciliatory," relations between Moscow and Berlin cooled that summer.[163] Regarding the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States in June, the German ambassador in Riga wrote this to his superiors: "Pro-Russian circles are for the moment claiming with great vehemence, that the entire action is directed against Germany, and in a short time an offensive into German territory will begin."[164]

Soviet authorities in Bessarabia advised ethnic Germans settled there not to exercise the option to migrate to Germany. They explained that the Red Army would invade the Reich soon, so there was no point in moving.[165] In October, the Germans came into possession of an original Soviet military document containing a plan to attack Rumania and capture Ploesti.[166] The Soviet chief of staff, Georgi Zhukov, transferred the 5th,

9th and 12th Armies to Bessarabia, deploying them 110 miles from the Rumanian oil fields. The 9th Army alone possessed more tanks than the entire German armed forces.[167]

On October 13, Ribbentrop wrote Stalin, suggesting that Molotov visit Berlin. Stalin accepted, sending his foreign affairs commissar on November 12. During the conferences, the Führer reminded his guest of Germany's support during the Finnish war and regarding the military occupation of the Baltic States and of Bessarabia. He argued that Germany and Russia always profited when working together; when they turned against one another, only foreign powers benefited. Hitler told Molotov that Germany had no political interest in Finland, but urgently needed her trade to acquire nickel and lumber. The only German troops there were en route to northern Norway, a transfer soon to be completed. He emphasized that Germany requires peace in the Baltic Sea region to continue the war against Britain.

Hitler and Ribbentrop, who remained cordial and patient throughout the conferences, urged Soviet expansion southward toward Persia and India. Molotov showed no interest in the suggestion. He repeatedly returned to his demands for increased Soviet influence over Finland and the Balkans, especially Bulgaria. The meeting, which ended with Molotov's departure on November 14, failed to reach a viable compromise. This compelled Hitler to gradually transfer more troops to the Reich's eastern frontier to hold possible Soviet expansion in check. As a result, he lacked adequate military resources to subdue England. By weakening Germany and indirectly encouraging the British to continue their resistance, Stalin prevented a conclusion of the fighting in the West.[168]

An event beyond Hitler's control further disrupted Soviet-German relations. On October 28 Italy, having entered the war on Germany's side in June, launched an unprovoked invasion of Greece. Mussolini's troops suffered heavy losses and made no progress. The tenacity of the Greek defenders, mountainous terrain, bad weather, and the poor leadership and ordnance of the Italian army hampered the offensive. Italian defeats in Greece and in Libya against the British substantially lowered Axis prestige among European neutrals.[169] The Italian press simultaneously publicized Mussolini's claims to certain Yugoslavian territory as well. In August,

Yugoslavia's regent, Prince Paul, told the German representative in Belgrade, Viktor von Heeren, "Regarding the attitude toward Germany, Germany's position on this aggressive policy of Italy's is of the greatest significance. The people respect Germany, but have contempt for Italy."[170] A Yugoslavian diplomat whom the Germans bribed revealed to Berlin details of Moscow's endeavors to win the Balkans for a pan-Slavic, anti-German coalition.

In December, Hitler directed the OKW to plan a military expedition against Greece. Athens began accepting British aid; were the Royal Air Force to transfer bomber squadrons to Greek air fields, they would be within range of Ploesti. The Germans needed to prevent England from forming a second front in southeastern Europe against Germany, protect the Rumanian oil wells and help the Italian army bogged down in Greece. Hitler hoped that a strong German military presence would persuade Athens to compromise and conclude peace with Italy. The prospect vanished when British troop contingents landed on March 10, 1941, to reinforce the Greeks.

The Soviet Union objected when the Germans concentrated troops in southern Rumania in January. The German 12th Army planned to cross from there into Bulgaria at the beginning of March, and deploy along the country's border with Greece. On January 13, the Soviet news agency *Tass* announced that the transfer of German troops to Bulgaria was taking place "with neither the knowledge nor the approval of the USSR."[171] Berlin responded that the operation was necessary to keep British forces off the continent. Ribbentrop publicly fixed the strength of the 12th Army on February 12 at the exaggerated figure of 680,000 men. This included "an especially high percentage of technological troops with the most modern ordnance, especially armored personnel." The purpose of the boast was to discourage the Russians from risking a military confrontation. They protested in a memorandum to the German Foreign Office, "The Soviet government...regards the presence of any armed force on Bulgarian territory...as a threat to the security of the USSR."[172]

Yugoslavia joined Germany's alliance system, the Three Power Pact, on March 25. Even though the Reich purchased grain from the country, there was a strong pan-Slavic movement in Yugoslavia and the armed forces

leadership was hostile toward Germany. Two days later, a military coup toppled the government. The army arrested prominent members of the former administration. The new head of state, General Dusan Simovic, confided to the British that he needed time to upgrade his armed forces but would then join with the USA, England and Russia to attack the Germans.[173]

Hitler disbelieved Simovic's public pledge to respect Yugoslavia's obligation to the Three Power Pact. The very day of the coup, the Führer told the OKW, "Yugoslavia must also . . . be considered an enemy and therefore be beaten as quickly as possible."[174] Moscow congratulated the new regime in Belgrade by telegram, declaring that the "Yugoslavian people have again proven worthy of their glorious past." Hungary's regent, Nicolaus von Horthy, warned Hitler, "Yugoslavia could scarcely have let herself be led down this path without a certain Soviet influence."[175]

The German army invaded Yugoslavia and Greece on April 6. Although American newspapers estimated the British expeditionary force in Greece at 240,000 men, the Germans more accurately fixed its strength at around 60,000.[176] Handicapped by ethnic dissonance within its ranks, unpreparedness and a poor command structure, the Yugoslavian army failed to offer cohesive resistance against the Germans. The Greek army fared no better. The British troops, who according to a German combat correspondent "got drunk during the day and chased girls at night," soon prepared to evacuate the mainland.[177] The German armed forces occupied both countries with minimal losses.



German mountain infantrymen, the *Gebirgsjäger*, negotiate Greece's picturesque, uneven terrain during the Balkan campaign in April 1941.

The Balkan debacle strained German-Soviet rapprochement. Moscow had concluded a non-aggression pact with the Simovic regime on April 5. Hitler correctly judged this as an unfriendly gesture. German soldiers discovered documents in Belgrade supporting this opinion. One found in the Soviet embassy read, "The USSR will only react at a given moment. The Axis powers have largely scattered their fighting forces, and for this reason the USSR will suddenly move against Germany."[178] German diplomatic analyst Ernst Woermann prepared a summary of the former Yugoslavian foreign minister's correspondence. Woermann concluded that the Soviets "encouraged Yugoslavia toward eventual opposition against Germany. . . . The Soviets are making hasty preparations." Prince Wied, the German ambassador in Stockholm, cabled Berlin on May 16, "The Soviet Russian representative here, Mrs. (Alexandra) Kollontai, said today as I found out, that in no time in Russian history have stronger troop contingents been concentrated on the western frontier of Russia than at present."[179]

Hitler received ominous signs of potential Soviet belligerency from other sources as well. From Helsinki came an encrypted telegram relating how the Soviet naval attaché there, Smirnov, disclosed to his American colleague Huthsteiner that "Russia will in all probability have to enter the

war on the side of the other great democracies."[180] The German counterintelligence chief, Walter Schellenberg, reported a dramatic increase in Soviet espionage, subversion and sabotage. Harbor police in various European ports captured dock workers placing explosives aboard German, Italian or Japanese merchant ships. In most cases the perpetrators were Communist agents. The Danish criminal police broke up a particularly destructive ring of Communist saboteurs run by Ernst Wollweber. Since 1938, its members had smuggled explosives aboard and sunk nearly 70 vessels bound from Scandinavian ports for Germany.[181] The OKW registered daily Soviet reconnaissance flights over German air space. It continuously supplied Hitler with assessments of steadily augmenting Russian forces deploying along the mutual frontier. This activity assumed "in increasing proportion a threatening character."[182]

Five weeks after the abortive talks with Molotov in November 1940, Hitler ordered the OKW to plan for an offensive against the USSR. He deliberated for the next several months on whether to exercise the option. After the fall of France, the Führer decided that a direct invasion of the British Isles was too risky. The alternate strategy of challenging English power in the Mediterranean depended largely on the capture of Gibraltar for success. The Germans could not launch an operation against this salient British position unless Spain entered the war, but Franco chose neutrality. With American aid for England mounting, Hitler saw no way of ending the war. The shift in Soviet orientation toward the West evoked the specter of an Anglo-American-Soviet alliance. The Russians could strike at Germany's flanks, Finland and Rumania, without warning. This could curtail vital deliveries of nickel and petroleum.

The Führer sensed the strategic initiative passing to the hands of his enemies. Only a dramatic thrust could rescue the situation, delivering a knock-out blow to Russia before she could join forces with the USA and confront Germany with an overwhelming military coalition. Eliminating the Soviet threat in a rapid campaign would enable the Reich to consolidate its position in Europe and concentrate on the war against England. A victory over the USSR would also strengthen Japan's influence in the Far East. Hitler believed that taking Russia out of the game would influence London to conclude a peace with Germany and discourage American intervention.

In April 1941, the Soviet government permitted a delegation of engineers from German armaments manufacturers, including Mauser, Henschel, and Daimler-Benz, to tour aeronautic research and production facilities inside the USSR. The organization, size and quality of the installations made a telling impression on the visitors. In a detailed evaluation prepared for the Reich's Air Ministry, the German delegates described among other things a single Soviet airplane engine factory that was larger than six German plants combined. Göring and the Luftwaffe staff considered the report exaggerated. He denounced the armaments engineers as defeatists who had fallen victim to a Soviet ruse. Hitler however, took the analysis seriously. He remarked, "You see how far these people have come. We'd better get started."[183] Since 1939 in fact, mass production of modern combat aircraft in the Soviet Union had increased by 70 percent. Though Hitler did not necessarily consider the Russians an immediate military threat, the danger their expanding armaments program posed down the road was of great concern.

Though German army commanders harbored reservations about starting a two-front war, most were optimistic about the prospects of a swift victory over the USSR.[184] The German general staff predicted a campaign of two to four months. Chief of staff Franz Haider underestimated the strength of the Red Army by half[185], and Foreign Armies East, a branch of German army intelligence, also understated the size of the Red Army. Analysts fixed the number of armored divisions at ten. In reality, the Soviets possessed 100 mechanized divisions, all with armor.[186]

The Germans received another disparaging assessment of Russian capabilities from Japan. The Soviet secret police chief in Manchuria, General Lyushkov, defected to the Japanese in 1938. They forwarded the transcripts of his interrogation to the German embassy in Tokyo. Lyushkov described the disorganization and incompetence of Red Army leadership. He offered examples demonstrating that the political structure inside the USSR was unstable and in the event of a major war, the entire system would collapse.[187]

Pursuant to the tradition of the foreign office, Ribbentrop tenaciously argued for a compromise with Moscow. On January 10, 1941, economist Schnurre signed an expansive trade agreement with the Soviet Union,

surpassing in scope all previous compacts and clearing away potential bottlenecks in Germany's supply of raw materials.[188] In addition to providing the Reich with Russian oil, cotton, fodder, phosphates, iron ore, scrap metal, chrome, and platinum, the Soviets purchased rubber in the Far East for the Germans and delivered it by rail. The Reich furnished industrial machinery and armaments in return. Schnurre and Ribbentrop presented the trade agreement to Hitler at the *Berghof on* January 26. In his lecture, Schnurre pointed out that it would nullify the effect of the English continental blockade. As this was virtually London's only hope for victory, Schnurre concluded that the Russian treaty "is a firm basis for an honorable and great peace for Germany."[189]

Hitler replied that he cannot give priority to the deliveries necessary for Germany to uphold the new trade agreement. The military situation in the Mediterranean, including North Africa, compelled him to give precedence to the requirements of the German and Italian armed forces. Schnurre wrote later that Ribbentrop's bearing "clearly demonstrated that at this time he opposed the Russian war."[190] After some wrangling, the two diplomats persuaded Hitler to approve the treaty.

Despite the war against Britain, the Germans were in a solid bargaining position with respect to the Soviet Union in January 1941. They largely dominated the European economy, and the success of their armed forces against Poland and France had impressed Soviet leaders. The Red Army General Boris Shaposhnikov overestimated the number of tanks and aircraft available to the German armed forces by more than double.[191] The German military was far superior to Finland's, whose soldiers had previously inflicted heavy losses on the Red Army despite being outnumbered. Further, Stalin mistrusted the British: During the 1940 French campaign, the Germans had captured and published Allied plans to use air bases in Turkey to bomb the Russian oil fields in Baku, even though the USSR was a non-belligerent.[192] The purpose was to indirectly disrupt Germany's fuel supply.

In some respects, Stalin regarded Germany as a buffer between the USSR and the capitalist powers. He told Ribbentrop in 1939, "I will never tolerate Germany becoming weak."[193] The Russian historian Irina Pavlova summarized, "For Stalin the growing power of National Socialism was a

positive factor in the evolution of international relations, because in his view it aggravated the dissonance between the principle capitalist powers."[194] Were Germany and Russia to come to blows, Stalin would indeed "pull the chestnuts out of the fire" for the democracies; something he himself had warned against in 1939.

The Reich's Foreign Office persistently opposed the plan to invade the USSR. Exasperated, Hitler called the unyielding Ribbentrop "my most difficult subordinate."[195] Schnurre even appealed to Generals Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl of the OKW to promote an understanding with the Kremlin: "I described the consequences of the Moscow negotiations and their great advantages for Germany; securing the supply of raw materials and a reserve of foodstuffs, plus far-reaching opportunities to trade with the East." Schnurre borrowed arguments about the expansiveness of Russia, her inexhaustible manpower pool and climate once employed by the Marquis Augustin de Caulaincourt, who had advised Napoleon against invading the Czar's empire in 1812. "My explanation sadly fell on deaf ears," Schnurre recalled. "Jodl answered that all this has been taken into account; from every indication it will be a short war."[196] German diplomats never abandoned the view that the Soviet-German pact could be salvaged, considering the Reich strong enough to hold Stalin to his obligations.

The Soviet military leadership prepared two operational plans for an invasion of central Europe, dated March 11 and May 15, 1941. The latter study stated that the Red Army must "deploy before the enemy does, and attack the German armed forces at the moment it is in the deployment stage, and is as yet unable to organize the coordination of the individual branches of service." A Soviet propaganda directive instructed journalists, "The fighting in this war has demonstrated so far, that a defensive strategy against superior motorized troop units brought no success and ended in defeat. An offensive strategy against Germany is therefore advisable, one which relies a great deal on technology."[197]

Whether Stalin ultimately decided to attack Germany, or had a fixed date in mind, is still a subject of debate. Thanks to German traitors, he received the text of Hitler's OKW directive to prepare an invasion plan of the USSR. Germany's support of Finland and military penetration into

Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia also worried the Soviet dictator. The Germans lagged on deliveries of machinery and weapons obligated by treaty. By June 1941, the Red Army had massed 81.5 percent of its forces opposite German-controlled territory.[198] Hitler opened hostilities on June 22, 1941, repeatedly warned by Keitel of the concentration of Soviet divisions on the frontier.



A scene from the German newsreel depicts infantrymen passing Soviet prisoners early in the Russian campaign. The Red Army's concentration on the frontier lent credence to German propaganda's claim that Stalin had been massing troops to invade Central Europe.

In justifying his resolve to launch a campaign against Russia, Hitler told Ribbentrop, "sooner or later, the so-called east-west pincers will be engaged against Germany."[199] Ribbentrop recalled after the war, "Confronted with the danger of an attack from both sides, the Führer saw the foregoing elimination of the Soviet Union as the only way out."[200] The decision came neither swiftly nor easily. His aid Walter Hewel recalled that anxiety over whether or not to invade the USSR so tormented Hitler that he required medication to sleep.[201]

Democratic court historians, especially in post-war Germany, attribute the Russian campaign to Hitler's ambition to gain Lebensraum, or living space, in the East. The theory rests on a tenuous assumption: Namely, that deadlocked in the fight against Britain and practically at war with the

United States, Hitler launched a colonial expedition against one of the world's most powerful empires, the principle supplier of natural resources vital to Germany's wartime economy, in order to secure surplus land for future German settlers. In truth, the Reich was short a million laborers in 1939, and the government offered incentives to foreign workers, especially Czechs, to migrate to Germany to fill vacancies in industry. After conquering Poland, Hitler told Mussolini that newly recovered German provinces like Posen would require 40-50 years to resettle and fully integrate into the economy.[202] Where would Hitler find colonists to export to Russia?

Further, the German Race and Resettlement Office promoted a program entitled "Come Home to the Reich." It encouraged ethnic Germans living in Poland, the Baltic States and the Balkans to migrate into Germany. In this way, the state hoped to partially cover the manpower shortfall in the economy. Were Hitler planning to colonize Russia, he would not have authorized an agency to draw Germans living in the East home to the Reich. At no time did the question of Lebensraum enter Hitler's deliberations on whether or not to invade the Soviet Union.

The "Number One Enemy"

Mercantile rivalry among nations is often the genesis of armed conflicts, though those profiting from the adventures publicly describe them as defensive wars or waged for altruistic reasons. The former U.S. President William Taft confessed that modern diplomacy is "fundamentally commercial," but cloaked in "idealistic feelings of humanitarianism and moral obligations."[203] Regarding American hostility toward Germany, which plagued Hitler throughout his tenure in office, economic considerations played a major role.

His country drained of gold reserves, Hitler created a novel money system to get the national economy back on its feet. Accordingly capital came to represent human productivity; work itself became money. Currency was no longer a commodity to be speculated upon, loaned at high interest, or wielded to manipulate economic life, but solely a means to facilitate transactions. Germany introduced new principles to international commerce as well. Hitler, in the words of the Canadian

historian Helmut Gordon, “was firmly convinced that as long as the international monetary system remains based on the value of gold, nations able to hoard the most gold can force those nations lacking gold to their will...compelling others to accept loans at high interest to dissipate their assets."[204] Hitler believed that a country’s power of production should determine the strength of her economy, and not the amount of gold in the treasury.

Germany concluded trade agreements with 25 financially distressed countries in southeastern Europe, the Near East, and South America. The treaties based transactions on an exchange of wares without monetary payments. In return for foodstuffs and raw materials, Germany supplied poorer nations with agricultural machinery, locomotives, and manufactured goods.[205] This was a barter system, which spared trade partners having to borrow from foreign banks to finance purchases—a relief for countries already in debt during the world-wide depression.

The mutually beneficial arrangement gradually deprived the United States, France, and Britain of markets they had previously dominated. Financial institutions in London and New York, accustomed to providing credit to smaller nations, lost a lucrative portion of their international commerce. British General Fuller wrote that Hitler’s “economic policy of direct barter and subsidized exports struck a deadly blow to British and American trade."[206] Lord Forbes, belonging to an English trade commission visiting South America, warned, “We don't want the Germans continuing to conduct their system of an exchange of goods and other disrespectful trade methods right under our nose."[207]

In 1941, President Roosevelt asked rhetorically, “Will anyone suggest that Germany’s attempt to dominate trade in central Europe was not a major contributing factor to war?"[208] Churchill remarked in 1938, “What we desire is the complete destruction of the German economy."[209] He told Lord Robert Boothby, “Germany’s most unforgivable crime before the Second World War was her attempt to extricate her economic power from the world’s trading system and to create her own exchange mechanism which would deny world finance its opportunity to profit."[210]

Addressing newly commissioned officers of the armed forces in May

1942, Hitler explained the challenge Germany's foreign trade treaties posed for the USA. He described how America enjoyed an abundance of grain and natural resources, plus maintained her own manufacturing industry. Countries wishing to trade with the United States therefore, had little to offer in exchange: "So America began taking gold for her labors, piling up this gold into the billions. Naturally this mineral threatens to become utterly worthless once it's realized that a new world is forming, one that no longer recognizes the concept of gold, but substitutes the concept of work and human productivity, and from then on begins to trade what is produced through labor without using gold."[211]

As far as the Germans were concerned, the U.S. Government and corporate America pursued the same goals. In the words of Giselher Wirsing, there was "no longer any force in the United States that could resist the unbridled domination of big business. There appeared to be no more difference between the interests of high finance and those of the state."[212] In Roosevelt, America elected a president inordinately concerned with foreign affairs. "Roosevelt was a determined internationalist and interventionist," observed Congressman Hamilton Fish.[213] The *New York Times* correspondent Arthur Krock described FDR as "considering himself absolutely indispensable to mankind."[214] A proponent of liberal democratic globalization, the new president strongly believed in the Versailles structure. Hitler's step-by-step eradication of the post-war order, German competition in European and South American markets, and the Reich's stand for the sovereignty of nations over the one-world concept made Roosevelt an irreconcilable enemy of Germany.

During the peacetime years, Washington opposed Hitler's efforts to revise the Versailles construction. In April 1933, Roosevelt told the French ambassador, "The situation is alarming. Hitler is a madman and his advisors, some of whom I know personally, are crazier than he is." (So far, Ambassador Hans Luther was the only German official the president had met.) FDR told his French guest, "France must not disarm and no one will demand it to."[215] A month later, Roosevelt wrote the heads of 54 countries urging disarmament.

The president discussed foreign affairs before an audience in Chicago in October 1937. He told listeners, "The present reign of terror and

international lawlessness began a few years ago," referring to Germany and Italy. Aggressor nations were supposedly "piling up armament on armament. . . . Their national income is being spent directly for armaments. It runs from 30 to as high as 50 percent in most of those cases." He suggested that such diseased countries should be quarantined, in other words economically boycotted. After publication of the speech, the Reich's War Ministry notified German military commanders, "Roosevelt's words may be regarded as America's formal decision to join the front of the democracies against the fascist states, abandoning the policy of isolation."[216] The Reich's press described FDR's speech as the "prelude to a huge armaments appropriation planned for the near future" by the Roosevelt administration.[217]

Upon orders from the White House, U. S. Navy Captain Royal Ingersoll went to London in December to discuss fleet cooperation with the British. The prospect of American naval support against Japan, Italy and Germany strengthened England's hand in negotiations with Hitler.

The German annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, initially produced a mild reaction from the American press and from Secretary of State Cordell Hull. This altered abruptly within 24 hours. The German ambassador reported to Berlin that the Anschluss suddenly became "regarded as a breach of treaty, as militarism, as the rape of defenseless little Austria by a neighbor armed to the teeth, and as a product of the policy of might makes right." As to the probable genesis of the about-face in American attitude, "the president personally became involved and gave both the State Department and the press corresponding guidelines."[218] The ambassador warned the Reich's Foreign Office that were Germany ever to become involved in a conflict against England, "there isn't much left here that could prevent the entrance of the United States into a war against us."[219]

Roosevelt reached beyond America's borders – and his authority – during the Sudeten crisis that September. To prevent this crucial revision of the Versailles system, he proposed to British Ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay that the U.S. and Royal Navies blockade the entire European Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean to cut Germany off from overseas imports.[220] Sea blockades are by international law an act of belligerency. FDR was

prepared to abandon neutrality and wage war to preserve Czechoslovakia's claim to the Sudetenland. Chamberlain, wary of Roosevelt's endeavors to extend U.S. influence into Europe, rejected the idea. "Then Washington began a savage campaign to malign the 'appeasers' who had again backed down before the dictators," wrote the editor of Germany's *Völkischer Beobachter (National Observer)*. "Chamberlain and Daladier were branded in the U.S. press as downright traitors to the democratic world cause."[221]



In March 1941, New York businessman Theodore Kaufmann published *Germany Must Perish*, advocating sterilization of the German population. *Time* magazine described it as a "sensational idea." This Berlin tract, depicting Kaufmann at his typewriter, dramatized the rising tide of anti-German sentiment in the United States.

Washington's intrigues impeded diplomatic resolution of Germany's bid for Danzig in 1939. On December 2, 1938, America's ambassador in Poland, Biddle, met with the Free City's Commissioner Burckhardt. Biddle,

Burckhardt recalled, "declared with genuine glee that the Poles are ready to wage war over Danzig. . . . Never since the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* has such religious hatred against Germany existed in America like today. Chamberlain and Daladier will be blown away by public opinion. It will be a holy war."[222] Roosevelt disrupted negotiations between Germany and England regarding a trade agreement in February 1939, during which Berlin offered far-reaching concessions to improve diplomatic relations, by making London a substantially better offer.[223] In this way he obstructed another attempt at Anglo-German reconciliation. The following month, Hans Thomsen, Ribbentrop's chargé de affaires in Washington, advised Berlin, "Roosevelt is personally convinced that Germany is the enemy that must be destroyed, because she is seriously disrupting the balance of powers and the status quo."[224]

On March 23, the president promised the British to transfer more U.S. Navy warships to Hawaii, thereby freeing the English Pacific fleet for deployment in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean. He instructed the American ambassador in London, Kennedy, to shore up Chamberlain's resolve to guarantee Poland. On FDR's instructions, the U.S. military attaché in Paris pledged American naval support to protect the French colony of Indochina from the Japanese. In this way, the president gradually increased Anglo-French dependency on the United States, indirectly augmenting his influence over the democracies in their negotiations with Hitler. The April 14, 1939 edition of the *Washington Times Herald* reported that Roosevelt was warning the English, in the form of an ultimatum, to make no concessions to Germany.[225]

The American ambassador in Paris, William Bullitt, informed the French government during the summer that if England and France did not come to Poland's aid in the event of a German attack, then they could expect no assistance from Washington in a general European war. They could on the other hand, reckon with the "full support" of the USA if they declared war on Germany on Poland's behalf.[226] The former French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet later wrote that Bullitt "urged France to take a strong stand against Hitler. I am convinced also that he persuaded Daladier that Roosevelt would intervene (in the war) if he saw that France and England were in danger. . . . Bullitt in 1939 did everything he could to make France enter the war."[227] Congressman Fish concluded, "If Roosevelt

had refrained from meddling in the European situation by encouraging England and France to believe that we would fight their battles, they would have reached an agreement by peaceful means to settle the Danzig issue . . . (and) avoided the disastrous war."[228]

On August 17, Hans Herwarth von Bittenfeld, a traitor on the Reich's embassy staff in Moscow, disclosed information about German-Soviet negotiations to the American diplomat Charles Bohlen. The German government had reassured the Kremlin that there "are no conflicts of interest (between us) regarding the countries from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea" and it was prepared to discuss "every territorial question in eastern Europe" with Stalin. The State Department's Sumner Welles relayed this intelligence to British Ambassador Lindsay. He in turn forwarded news of the German-Soviet understanding, which implied dire consequences for Poland, to the Foreign Office in London. A Soviet spy there, Herbert King, notified Stalin of the intrigue. The Soviet dictator most likely assumed that the British would forewarn Beck of the danger facing his country, leading him to seek rapprochement with Germany. "But Stalin overestimated British and American fairness," as a German historian put it.[229] Neither democratic government passed this vital information on to Warsaw.

Herwarth also leaked the complete text, including the secret protocol about dividing Poland, of the August 23 agreement Ribbentrop had concluded in Moscow.[230] Bohlen likewise communicated it to Washington. Bullitt, fully aware of the text and import of the German-Soviet secret protocol, told a Polish diplomat in Paris, Count Lukasiewicz, that the document addressed only the status of the Baltic States and not Poland.[231] As a result, Beck remained doubtful about serious cooperation between Moscow and Berlin.

The result of Germany's rapid victory over Poland in September, France's passive strategy of defense, and England's token commitment to the continental war was a stalemate. On October 6, 1939, Hitler addressed the Reichstag, asking for a peace conference. Chamberlain himself admitted in his diary that the Führer presented some "very attractive proposals."[232] Roosevelt however, pressured the British not to allow a "second Munich." Göring, Hitler's number-two man, met with the

American consul general in Berlin on October 9 and urged that FDR mediate peace talks. Offering to travel to Washington personally to represent Germany in the negotiations, Göring expressed Berlin's willingness to re-establish Polish and Czech independence as a demonstration of good faith.[233] Roosevelt formally refused to arbitrate a cease fire. During a press conference that month, he described the German offer as the product of anonymous subordinates in the Reich's propaganda ministry and without substance.[234]

Two American tycoons visited Germany in October, hoping to open the road to negotiations. On the 19th, Göring told James Mooney, a senior executive of General Motors, "If we could conclude a treaty with the English today, we'll throw Russia and Japan overboard tomorrow."[235] Göring again offered to reinstate Poland and the Czech state to William Davis, a Texas oil magnate on a semi-official visit to Berlin. Even American newspapers acknowledged that considering Roosevelt's outspoken hostility toward Germany, for the Germans to nominate him and accept his judgment as arbitrator in a peace conference was a generous concession.[236] Upon returning home, Davis was unable to obtain an audience with the president. Hull yanked his passport, to prevent Mr. Davis from returning to Europe and interfering with the progress of the war.[237]

In Warsaw, Ribbentrop's staff compiled the pre-war diplomatic correspondence between Warsaw and its missions in Washington, London, and Paris. The *Völkischer Beobachter* published the content on October 27. Its editor summarized, "The Polish documents prove that Roosevelt's diplomacy bears a major, if not the greatest measure of responsibility for the outbreak of the English war."[238] One letter for example, was from the Polish general staff to Beck. It quoted the American military attaché, Commander Gade, as promising Poland 1,000 airplanes "as soon as the war begins." The Polish staff officer described Gade as "a man who enjoys the confidence of Roosevelt and is a personal friend of his. . . . He is very unfriendly towards Germany. Personally he is very wealthy."[239]

Another document the Germans brought to light was a report by Count Jerzy Potocki, the former Polish ambassador in Washington, about a conversation he had had with Bullitt in November 1938: "About Germany and Chancellor Hitler, he (Bullitt) spoke vehemently and with great

hatred. . . . The United States, France, and England must rearm tremendously in order to be in a position to cope with German power. Only then, when the moment is ripe, declared Bullitt further, will one be ready for the final decision. . . . In reply to my question whether the United States would take part in such a war, he said, 'Undoubtedly yes, but only after Great Britain and France had made the first move!'"[240] Ribbentrop presented the original Polish foreign policy letters to the international press for inspection. The editor of the American edition of the German White Book, which published 16 of the letters in English, concluded, “It is likely that they are authentic documents. This is the opinion of many Washington correspondents, including Sir Willmott Lewis of the London *Times*, who might be expected to be skeptical of them."[241] Roosevelt and Hull publicly claimed that the Polish documents were forgeries.

During this time, the White House focused on persuading Congress to amend the 1937 neutrality law. The law imposed an embargo on the sale of war materiel to belligerents in Europe. Already in September, the president had managed to have the restrictions partially relaxed. As a result, U.S. arms manufacturers sold $4,429,323 worth of ordnance to France that month, and $1,422,800 to England.[242] Germany’s share in armaments purchases from America, according to the State Department Bulletin of October 28, 1939, was $49.[243] By the close of 1940, Britain had purchased $2.7 billion in arms from the United States. Roosevelt told a cabinet member, “We have been milking the British financial cow, which had plenty of milk at one time but which has now about become dry."[244]The president speculated on how to keep the British at war “until their supply of dollars runs out."[245]

GiselherWirsing, editor of Germany’s popular *Signal* magazine, made this observation about the arsenal of democracy: “The armaments business has grown to one of the worst rackets in American history and has amassed billions in profits through this 'trading in death.' During 1940, there was an enormous increase in dividends. According to an exhibit of the National City Bank in New York, the clear profit of around 2,600 shareholding companies in 1940 amounted to $4,253 million, compared to $3,565 million in 1939."[246] Congressman Fish recalled, “Roosevelt’s war cabinet had a great deal of cooperation from the powerful Eastern press, largely for war. . . . Pro-war propaganda was heavily financed by the

international bankers, armament makers, and big business, numerically few in numbers but exceedingly powerful in financial resources and control over vast publicity and propaganda."[247] Reverend John McNicholas, the Archbishop of Cincinnati, remarked in January 1941, "Ten percent of our people are cunningly forcing the United States into a world conflict, while the majority of 90 percent, which is for peace, stands aside silently and helplessly."[248]



The German media published this image of President Roosevelt wearing a Masonic ring, emphasizing his affiliation with Freemasonry, a worldwide society influential in political and economic affairs. This was to support charges by both German propaganda and American isolationists that FDR was an internationalist.

As Congress eased restrictions on selling weapons to belligerents, America provided logistical support for England to continue the war. Under Washington's leadership, the Western Hemisphere countries proclaimed a

nautical security zone southward from Canada. This zone, 300 to 1,000 miles wide in places, was off-limits to combat operations of warring powers. Hitler ordered his navy to refrain from attacking British merchant vessels inside this belt. It substantially reduced the sea lanes the English Royal Navy had to patrol to guard cargo ships en route to Britain. U.S. warships eventually assisted in protecting convoys, monitoring the movement of German U-boats, and reporting their findings to the Royal Navy.[249]

During September 1941, Roosevelt decided to become “more provocative,” adding that if the Germans “did not like it they could attack American forces.” He ordered U.S. warships “to attack any U-boat which showed itself, even if it were 200 or 300 miles away from the convoy."[250]In three separate incidents in September and October, U.S. destroyers on anti-submarine patrol crossed lances with German U-boats. In one occurrence, the *USS Greer* assisted a British bomber in a depth charge attack against the *U-652*. Bombarded for four hours, the U-boat finally launched two torpedoes against its assailant.[251] The *Greer* eventually broke off the engagement. Roosevelt told the American public in a September 11 radio address, “I tell you the blunt fact that the German submarine fired first upon the American destroyer without warning and with deliberate design to sink her. . . . We have sought no shooting war with Hitler."[252] The Navy Department refused to furnish the *Greer’s* log to the Senate.[253]

Hitler instructed his U-boats to avoid confrontations with the U.S. Navy and to fire only in self-defense. According to a Gallup survey, 87 percent of Americans opposed involvement in a European war, and in that day and age Congress still had many representatives who understood their duty to respect the wishes of the majority.[254] Roosevelt could not arbitrarily start a war against Germany. Unless the enemy fired the first shot, and Hitler was eschewing incidents, the United States would remain sidelined: a silent partner in the Allied war effort. The president therefore sought what an American historian described as the “back door to war"; to provoke a conflict with Germany’s ally, Japan.

Like Germany, Japan is a country that relies heavily on imports. The European war seriously curtailed her commerce. As a result, the Japanese

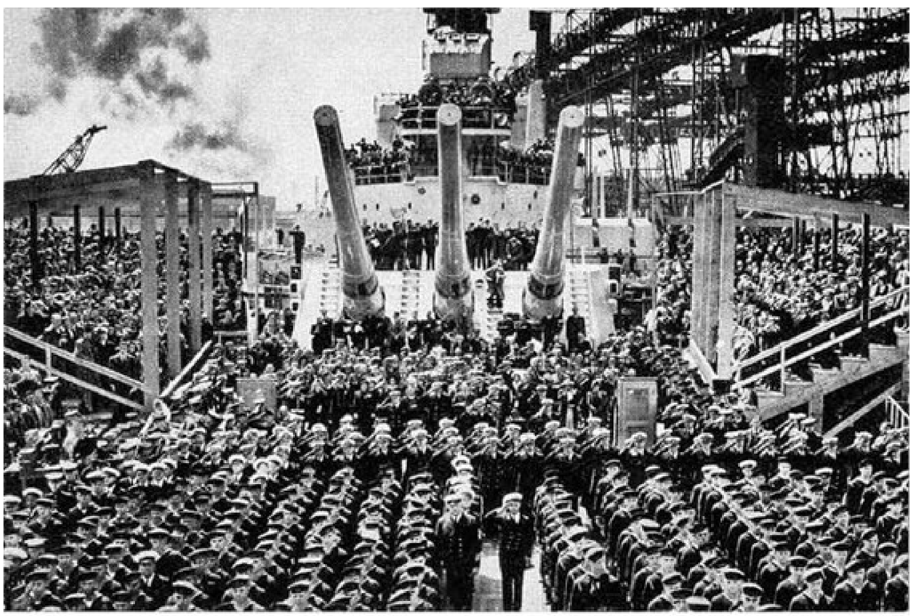
depended on increased trade with the United States. Supporting China in her war against Japan, Roosevelt imposed various embargoes on the island empire. On October 10, 1940, the secretary of the navy told Admiral James Richardson, commander-in-chief of the fleet, that the president wants U.S. warships deployed "across the western Pacific in such a way as to make it impossible for Japan to reach any of her sources of supply." [255] Richardson objected that distributing our navy in such a vulnerable manner against a formidable maritime adversary, and in so doing provoking it to belligerency, would be militarily senseless. Roosevelt dropped the idea.

Considering the USSR the greater menace, Tokyo sought an understanding with the United States. In November 1940, Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka asked Bishops James Walsh and Pater Drought of the Catholic Missionary Society of Maryknoll, New York, to deliver his peace proposal to Washington. Meeting with the president and secretary of state on January 23, 1941, the emissaries relayed Japan's willingness to negotiate cancelling her pact with Germany, evacuating her army from China, and respecting Chinese sovereignty.[256] At the close of the two-hour meeting, Roosevelt and Hull agreed to consider the proposals. Walsh and Drought heard nothing further from the White House.

In February, Tokyo appointed Admiral Kichisaburo Nomura, acquainted with Roosevelt from World War I, ambassador to the United States. Meeting with the president on the 14th, and in over 40 sessions with Hull during the next several months, Nomura was unable to reach a compromise with the administration. Washington was in fact more interested in the action proposal submitted on October 7, 1940, by naval Lieutenant Commander Arthur McCollum. This memorandum stated, "Prompt aggressive naval action against Japan by the United States would render Japan incapable of affording any help to Germany and Italy in their attack on England. ... It is in the interest of the United States to eliminate Japan's threat in the Pacific at the earliest opportunity."[257]

McCollum suggested among other things, that America "completely embargo all U.S. trade with Japan, in collaboration with a similar embargo imposed by the British Empire," and pressure the Dutch to "refuse to grant Japanese demands for undue economic concessions, particularly

oil." McCollum cautioned, "It is not believed that in the present state of political opinion the United States government is capable of declaring war against Japan without more ado." The author introduced an eight-point program to provoke the Japanese: "If by these means Japan could be led to commit an overt act of war, so much the better. At all events we must be fully prepared to accept the threat of war."[258] In November 1941, Secretary of War Henry Stimson speculated in his diary on how to maneuver Japan into "firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves."[259]



Germany's nemesis in the Atlantic: the United States Navy. This picture of a ceremony aboard a U.S. battleship appeared in a German publication, describing America's armed forces as "Roosevelt's trump card."

Without Congress' knowledge, Hull delivered an antagonistic ultimatum to Japanese negotiators on November 26. He himself confessed, "We had no serious thought that Japan would accept our proposal." [260] The terms, had Tokyo agreed to them, would have so substantially weakened Japan's position in the Far East, especially with respect to China and Russia, that they were unacceptable.[261] The Japanese responded by opening hostilities against U.S. and British bases in the Pacific. The infamous air raid on the U.S. naval base at Hawaii, conducted by 350 carrier-based Japanese bombers and fighters, galvanized American public opinion and Congress to enter the war.

The Three Power Pact that Germany had concluded with Italy and Japan in September 1940 was a defensive alliance. It did not obligate the Reich to declare war on the United States, since Japan had struck the first blow. The Japanese for example, had done nothing to assist the Germans in their war against the Soviet Union which had been raging for six months. But U.S. warships were taking part in the battle of the Atlantic. Federal attorneys in fact had determined that Roosevelt's swap in September 1940 of 50 destroyers in exchange for British bases in the Caribbean and Newfoundland not only violated American laws, but by international law put the USA in a technical state of war with Germany.[262]

The primary influence in Hitler's deliberations was the situation in the East. During the summer of 1941, the German armed forces had advanced far into Russia, winning impressive victories over the Red Army. Dogged Soviet resistance, overextended German supply lines and a severe winter then forced the invaders onto the defensive. Another factor contributed to the shift of the initiative to the Russians: logistical support from the United States. Less than five weeks after Germany had invaded the USSR, Roosevelt's emissary, Harry Hopkins, was in Moscow offering aid to Stalin: "The president regards Hitler as the enemy of all humanity and therefore wishes to help the Soviet Union in its war against Germany."[263] Without demanding any payment whatsoever, and despite protests from the U.S. Army, Roosevelt prioritized supplying the Russians with immense quantities of war materiel by sea. Stalin confessed in 1943 that without American aid, "we would lose the war."[264]

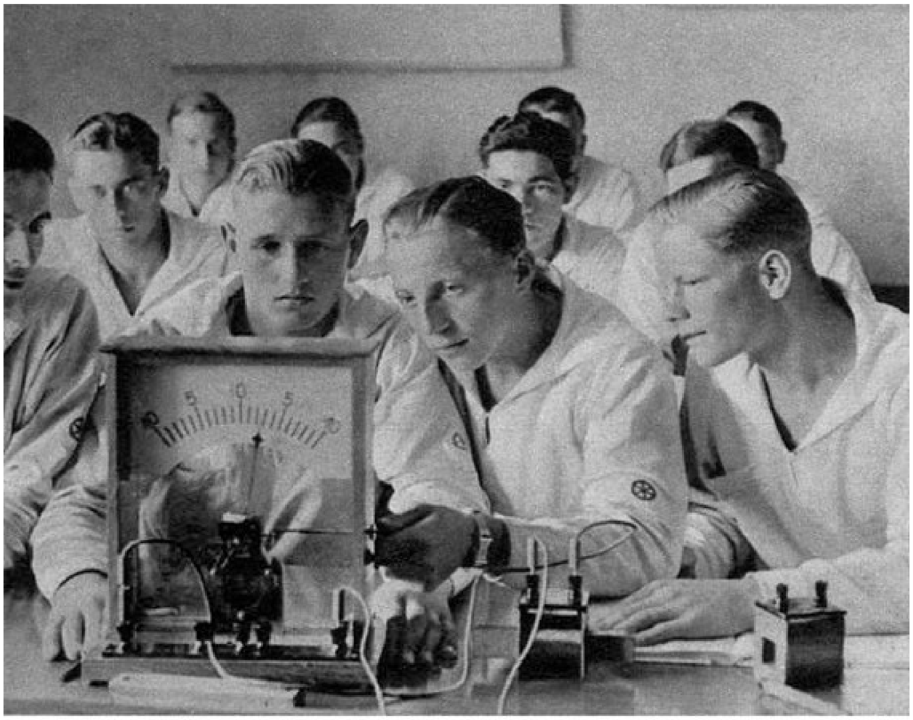
Hitler believed that it would only be possible to regain the initiative against this military behemoth were the flow of supplies from the United States curtailed. Unrestricted submarine warfare could sever the nautical lifelines keeping the Soviet fighting forces combat-effective. His U-boat commanders were still under orders not to torpedo American ships and to avoid the expansive security zone of the Western Atlantic. These orders not only prevented the German navy from disrupting the delivery of ordnance to England and Russia, but were demoralizing the U-boat crews. Declaring war on the USA would free the German navy to fight the battle of the Atlantic with the gloves off, and buy the army time for another major thrust against Russia during the 1942 campaign season. Against the advice of Ribbentrop, Hitler declared war on December 11, 1941. This

gained Germany a temporary tactical advantage.

The Reichstag convened on the 11th to hear the Führer's announcement. He recapped the history of his country's poor relations with Washington, beginning with Roosevelt's 1937 quarantine speech, through the president's promises to Poland in 1939, and finally the U.S. Navy's operations on behalf of Britain. Hitler also offered a personal comparison of his own experience as a combat soldier during World War I with that of FDR, who had then been undersecretary of the navy: "Roosevelt comes from a super-rich family, belonging from the start to that class of people whose birth and background pave the way to advancement in a democracy. I myself was just the child of a small and poor family, and had to struggle through life through toilsome work and by personal industry.

"When the World War came, Roosevelt found a spot in the shade under Wilson and experienced the war from the sphere of those who reaped dividends from it. He therefore knew only the pleasant consequences of the clash of nations and states; those that provide opportunity for one to do business while another bleeds. . . . As an ordinary soldier I tried to do my duty in the face of the enemy during these four years, and naturally returned home from the war as impoverished as I had entered it in the fall of 1914. I shared the fate of millions. Mr. Franklin Roosevelt shared his with the so-called upper ten thousand. While Mr. Roosevelt after the war was already trying his hand at financial speculation . . . I was still lying in a hospital."[265]

The German U-boat fleet launched its first coordinated operation, *Paukenschlag* (Pounding), against American shipping on January 13, 1942. During the balance of the month, the Germans sank 49 merchant vessels in the Atlantic and in the North Sea. They tallied 84 steamers during a second nautical offensive in March. By the end of 1942, the U-boats had conducted five major operations, sinking 1,160 ships totaling 6,266,215 tons.[266] They targeted both convoys bound for English harbors and those delivering supplies to the Soviet port of Murmansk. This brought some relief to the German armies fighting in the East. In the long run however, American wharves built more ships than the U-boats could torpedo. As the 1942 summer offensive against Russia lost impetus, Germany gradually became snared in the "east-west pincers" as Hitler had feared.



German sailors take instruction at the submarine warfare school. They would become the first of their countrymen to fight against U.S. military forces

Chapter 5

The Mission of the Reich

The Waffen SS

Nations often maintain elite troops to supplement regular military forces. They serve as personal bodyguards for the ruler, perform ceremonial functions, and in wartime deploy where the fighting is the hardest. From the Persian Immortals and Roman Praetorians of the Ancient World throughout the ages, elite formations uphold traditions of prowess in combat and loyalty. During World War II, France's *Chasseurs Alpins*, British Royal Marines, Soviet Guard divisions and the U.S. Marine Corps were among units retaining this select status.

In addition to the prestigious army divisions *Brandenburg, Feldherrnhalle* and *Grossdeutschland*, as well as the airborne, Germany fielded an entire service branch of elite ground forces: the Waffen (armed) SS. It evolved from four pre-war internal security regiments into a dauntless and respected front-line troop. It challenged official German policy and dogma and helped introduce significant amendments. Considering the obedience to state authority customarily drilled into military establishments, this was an unusual wellspring for political and social reform. The maturation of the Waffen SS demonstrates how National Socialism's emphasis on personal initiative created the opportunity for flexibility and development on an unprecedented scale.

The SS traces its origin to the early years of the NSDAP. Fewer than 100 men formed the "Adolf Hitler Shock Troop" in Munich in 1923. This was a personal bodyguard recruited from SA men displaying personal loyalty to the Führer. Its members generally possessed better comprehension of the movement's political objectives than the rank-and-file SA. The troop received its final name, *Schutzstaffel* (Security Echelon), in April 1925. It maintained strict discipline and a small, selective affiliation. Heinrich Himmler became chief of the SS in January 1929, and proved a talented organizer and a match for political rivals in the party. Once Hitler gained

power in 1933, Himmler sought to enroll affluent persons, such as successful businessmen and aristocrats, to enhance the organization's prestige. Private contributions through a public sponsorship program helped finance the administration. The SS grew from 280 members in 1929 to 52,000 by 1933.[1]

National security issues led to the formation of an SS military branch. When Hitler became chancellor, Communists were still numerous in Germany. They hijacked 150 tons of explosives, of which just 15 tons had been recovered by the police by mid-March 1933.[2] The exiled Communist Wilhelm Piech issued a proclamation in September, calling for a general strike and "armed insurrection by the majority of the German proletariat" to topple the "Hitler dictatorship."[3] The police were neither equipped nor trained to suppress a possible uprising. The German army was not psychologically suited to wage urban warfare against elements of the indigenous population.

After discussions with War Minister Werner von Blomberg, Hitler decided that the task of combating potential civil unrest should fall to a party formation. Blomberg's decree of September 24, 1934, defined its purpose as "for special, internal political missions assigned by the Führer to the SS."[4] This was the birth of the Waffen SS, officially titled the *Verfügungstruppe* from 1935-1940. Abbreviated to VT, the expression translates literally as "Availability Troop," meaning ready for immediate deployment. Hitler himself stated, "The SS *Verfügungstruppe* is neither a part of the armed forces nor of the police. It is a standing armed troop available exclusively for my use."[5]

The VT consisted of the *Leibstandarte*, Hitler's Berlin-based bodyguard, which performed primarily ceremonial functions, the *Deutschland* regiment garrisoned in Munich, *Germania* in Hamburg, plus an engineer battalion in Dresden and a signals battalion in Berlin. A fourth motorized infantry regiment, *Der Führer*, mustered in Vienna in 1938. With army approval, the SS established a military academy to train VT officers at Bad Tölz in October 1934. General Paul Hausser, who had retired from the army in 1932, received a commission to found a second school in Brunswick. Each institution offered a ten-month curriculum to commission officers. The VT soldier's pay was the same as that of the regular army.

Adding an artillery regiment, as well as anti-aircraft, anti-tank, and reconnaissance battalions, the VT numbered 18,000 men by May 1939.[6] Though the army assisted in instruction, the VT's training departed from military convention. Its senior commanders had been junior officers during World War I. They witnessed how battles of materiel had decimated the army's long-standing cadre of well-schooled professional officers, non-commissioned officers (NCO's) and reservists. The quality of personnel declined as hastily-trained replacements filled the void. The general staff failed to break the deadlock of trench warfare. Frontline regiments began forming small, independent units called shock troops. They re-trained behind the lines to fight in close coordination using flame throwers, smoke canisters, machine guns, pistols, and grenades. Officers displayed boldness and initiative, directly leading their men into combat.

The commander of the *Deutschland* regiment, Felix Steiner, wrote that during World War I, the officers "assembled the best, most experienced soldiers the front could spare. . . . They realized the shock troop concept of spontaneity, rapid assault, and the mechanics of the little troop's trade within the framework of entire formations. They were of different spirit than the mobilized masses. . . . In a world of standardization of soldiering, they proved that better trained, hand-picked soldiers, mastering the military technology of the times, were a match for any vastly superior, collective soldierly mass."[7]



Personnel of the SS Engineer Battalion board a train for Nuremburg to attend the 1936 NSDAP congress. The men have the same type of rifles and equipment that were issued during World War I.

After World War I, the German general staff reverted to the pre-war concept of a disciplined professional army without particular emphasis on improvisation. Though the army still trained officers at lower command levels to take initiative and be decisive in battle, the program did not include forming shock troops. Steiner exploited the comparative independence of the VT to develop a contemporary fighting force less constrained by customary military regimen. “Not the form of Prussian drill still in part practiced in the army, but training and educating men to become modern, individual fighters was the goal,” wrote the former SS Captain Fritz Schutter.[8] Though Steiner acknowledged that mass armies are an indispensable element of total war, he considered rapidly mobile elite formations distributed among the army decisive, in order to “disperse the enemy through lightning-fast blows and destroy his scattered units.” In the words of one historian, the training program Steiner introduced to the *Deutschland* regiment “broke the preeminence of mechanical barracks drill."[9]

Physical education also played a significant role in the VT. It promoted the “soldier-athlete” concept. Competitive sports supplanted calisthenics

and forced marches as the focus of the training. Enlisted personnel competed against their officers and NCO's in sports contests. The purpose was not just to weld leader and followers into a cohesive fighting unit. It also taught officers to rely on their ability to command and strength of character to gain the confidence and respect of the men, rather than on the customary aloofness and strict discipline of military protocol. In the same spirit, the VT dropped the practice of soldiers addressing officers as "sir" or speaking in the third person. Through such steps, "the relationship between the leadership and men became much more personal and ultimately more binding."[10] Officers and men dined together in the same mess hall.[11]

Pastor Karl Ossenkop, a former army captain transferred to the Waffen SS, recalled, "contrary to the army, disparity in rank was no barrier dividing person from person. There was no pedantic structure held together by fear of punishment. This did not lead to a lack of discipline, but to a voluntary discipline such as I have seldom experienced. . . . In this corps one felt completely free."[12] A former director of the Tölz academy summarized, "The authority of the officers, who were scarcely older than the men, rested far more on esteem for their character, performance, and care for the men's welfare."[13] A soldier in the *Germania* regiment in 1937 and future officer, Heinrich Springer, wrote this of his first platoon commander: "He was not just a military instructor, but guided us in cultivating a decent personal bearing, inwardly and outwardly perceptible. Throughout the entire time as a recruit, I never once heard him shout at or curse the men."[14]



SS General Felix Steiner (left) was an advocate of granting equal status to eastern peoples. Here he confers with a young army captain on the eastern front in the spring of 1943.

The former general staff officer Hausser patterned the instruction at the Brunswick academy to be similar to army institutions. The two SS *Junkerschulen*, or Schools for Young Gentlemen, assigned top priority to preparing candidates for field operations and tactical combat command. Instructors also placed emphasis on personality development. As Lieutenant Colonel Richard Schulze wrote, “The Junker Schools' goal was to produce men of refined, fearless character, chivalrous with an unblemished sense of honor and obedience, displaying helpfulness, camaraderie, and willingness to accept responsibility. Impeccable deportment in public and cultivation of family values were also prerequisites."[15] The staff encouraged cadets to exhibit a respectful, but never subservient demeanor toward superiors. The VT educated field officers to exercise audacity as well as initiative.



General Paul Hausser strongly influenced development of the SS-VT.

The Junker Schools did not select candidates from among the general SS, but from enlisted members of the VT. Only men who had already served in the ranks could receive an appointment to Bad Tölz or to Brunswick. In the German army, a university degree was sufficient for an applicant to be accepted into a war college. Education had no influence on VT standards for enrollment. Many Junker School cadets did not possess a high school diploma.[16] The institutions nonetheless graduated capable officers. The English historian Gerald Reitlinger concluded, “Under the influence of Hausser’s cadet schools, the Waffen SS developed the most efficient of all military training systems of the Second World War."[17]

Georg Jestadt, who belonged to the 12th SS Panzer Division in 1944, wrote this of the men he served under: “We had fantastic superior officers, from platoon leaders to the battalion commanders and upward, who were genuine ideals for the men. Looking back, I can objectively state that during the Normandy operation, amid all the inferno and terror, I never saw a superior officer suffer a breakdown or lose his nerve. Again and again, when things looked so hopeless and critical, they mastered the situation calmly and with presence of mind."[18]

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, the VT fell under armed forces command. The OKW distributed most VT formations among army divisions participating in the campaign. The SS soldiers acquitted themselves well in battle, and expansion and reorganization of the VT followed. Hausser formed *Deutschland, Germanid, Der Führer*, and their combat support units into a single division in October 1939. That same month, the SS transferred 15,000 law enforcement personnel to create the SS Police Division. Yet another new division, *Totenkopf (Death's* Head), filled its roster largely from concentration camp guards and incorporated the Home Guard Danzig. Together with Hitler's bodyguard, the *Leibstandarte*, the military branch of the SS now numbered 100,000 men.[19] The entire force deployed in the 1940 campaign against Holland, Belgium, and France, fighting side by side with the regular army.



The SS-VT regiment *Deutschland* parades in Nuremburg for a pre-war NSDAP congress.

The SS had accomplished the expansion of the VT, renamed the Waffen SS in 1940, by shifting men from other contingents under Himmler's command. This was necessary because the OKW, which had jurisdiction over the draft, limited the number of indigenous recruits whom the Waffen SS could induct. In order to increase its quantity of divisions, the chief of SS recruitment, Gottlob Berger, developed a fresh source of manpower. He introduced a campaign to encourage enlistment from among the expansive ethnic German colonies in Southeastern Europe. In May 1939, 1,080 members of Rumania's German community left the country to join the Waffen SS. They preferred to avoid service in the Rumanian army, whose officers treated ethnic German recruits badly.

During the war, the roster of ethnic Germans from beyond the Reich's frontier who served in the Waffen SS would greatly increase; over 60,000 of them came from Rumania alone.[20] In time, Berger's solution for increasing manpower would significantly redefine the character of the Waffen SS.

Germanic Volunteers

A primary element determining the survival of a species is its ability to adapt to shifting environs. This natural law applies to nations as well. War forces abrupt changes that demand endurance and flexibility of disposition in order to rapidly accept new conditions. In Hitler's time, nationalism was a compelling influence. It roused people to give for their country, but simultaneously maintained barriers between nations. On the threshold of World War II, Europe stood in the shadow of peripheral superpowers prepared to contest her leadership in world affairs. To assert her economic and political independence and preserve her cultural identity, her populations needed to evolve toward mutual cooperation and fellowship. Italy's former treasurer Alberto De Stefani observed, "We're all persuaded that continuation of this intransigent nationalism, which has no understanding for the requirements of a continental policy, is finally turning Europe against herself."[21]

Europe settled into an uneasy peace in the summer of 1940, following a series of rapid campaigns Germany had conducted against neighboring states. German army garrisons held Western Poland, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Holland, Belgium, and Northern France. Allied with Italy and favored by Spain, the Reich also enjoyed economic influence over the Balkans. Cooperation with Germany was necessary for a strong, unified continent.

The continuing war against Britain required the German armed forces to occupy the North Atlantic coast to guard against potential British landings. The German military presence was not popular with the populations affected. The English also supported Communist "resistance" movements in the occupied countries, encouraging sabotage. They trained and smuggled in agents, plus weapons and explosives, while the BBC broadcast anti-German wireless propaganda designed for Western Europe.

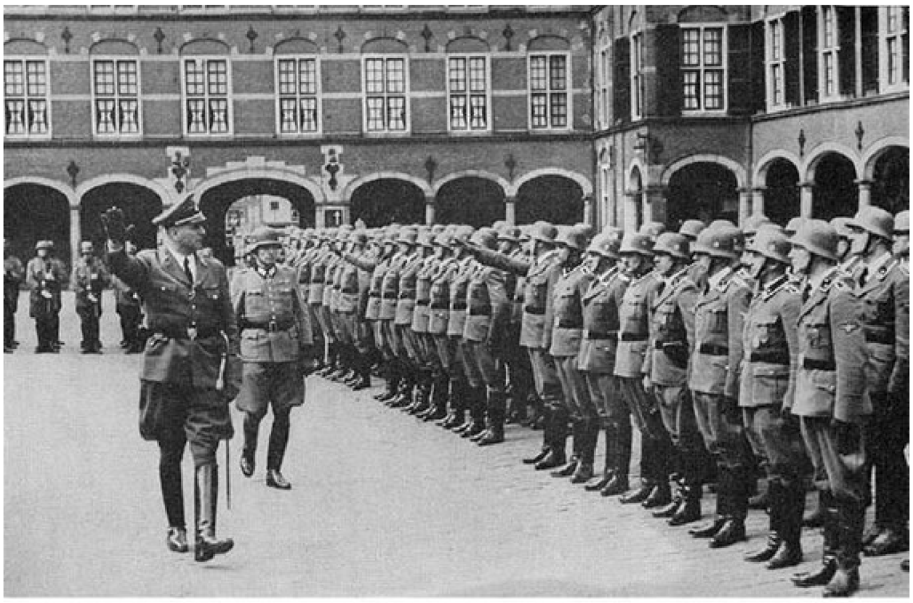
At the same time, many Europeans regarded the Reich's victories as a demonstration of the authoritarian state form's superiority. Democracy had not only failed to alleviate unemployment and depression for the past 20 years, but bungled national defense. Germany's spirited, martial society aroused awe and to some extent, admiration among her neighbors. The parliamentary debates, scandals, lack of progress and uninspired leadership associated with democracy seemed vapid by comparison. Marxism had an equally unimpressive track record. Leon Degrelle, a Belgian who eventually served in the Waffen SS, wrote that Marxism "nowhere reached its promised goal of welfare for all. . . . The broad masses considered it a complete failure during the 1930s. They sought the remedy in other mass movements, those that tried to realize the desired social objectives within the framework of order, authority, firm leadership, and devotion to fatherland."[22]

One blight on the track record of Western European governments, as far as the people in their charge were concerned, was the dismal military performance against Germany in 1940. In Norway for example, the state had periodically slashed defense spending between the World Wars. The army could no longer afford to conduct field exercises, officers and men received inadequate training,[23] and there were no anti-tank weapons for the infantry.

The Germans invaded Norway on April 9. The German navy had urged Hitler to take this step in order to thwart a planned British amphibious operation to come ashore to sever the Reich's transit route importing strategic minerals from Sweden and Finland via Norway. The German armed forces landed 100,000 men from ships and planes. The indecisive reaction of the Norwegian government and conflicting military orders plunged Norway's mobilization into chaos.

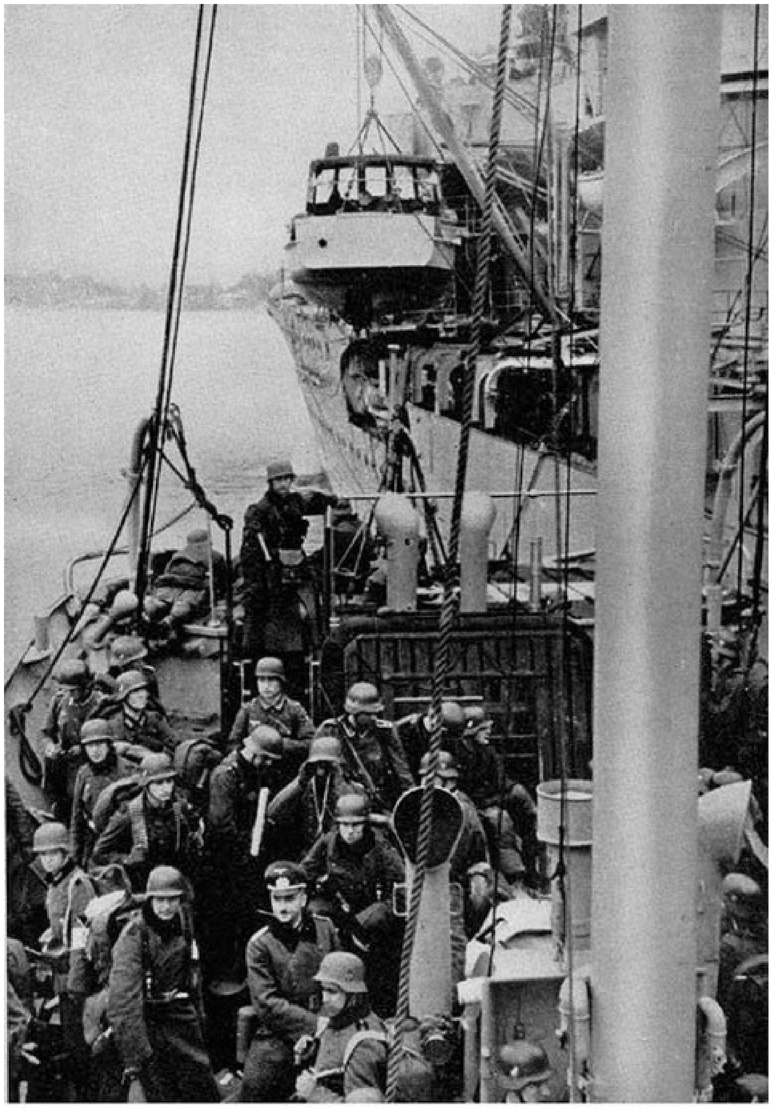
Retreating Norwegian army units failed to uniformly destroy tunnels, bridges, or lines of communication to delay the enemy's advance. German motorized units refueled their vehicles at pumping stations the defenders had abandoned intact. Some Norwegian troops surrendered at first sight of the invaders.[24] The capital fell without a shot fired. The German 324th Infantry Regiment landed at a nearby airfield and entered Oslo in marching order led by its brass band.

The German armed forces simultaneously occupied Denmark. This was to secure lines of communication and supply to the strategic Norwegian theater of operations. The previous January, Thorvald Stauning, head of the country's social-liberal government, had more or less admitted publicly that Denmark would be unable to defend her neutrality.[25] He did nothing to improve defense capabilities.



A shadow over occupied Europe: The SD, here being inspected in The Hague by the German police chief in Holland, Hanns Rauter. The SD recruited well-educated men from affluent families and became an efficient security force.

In the early morning of April 9, the German icebreaker *Stettin* and the troop transport *Hansestadt Danzig*, ferrying 1,000 riflemen of 198th Infantry Division, steamed into Copenhagen harbor. Danish searchlights illuminated the ships' German war flag and the soldiers on deck. The coastal batteries however, never fired. As one Danish lieutenant told a parliamentary commission after the war, "The men on watch fumbled with the cannon but had no idea of what actually to do. The mechanism was out of order, so that the breach didn't work."[26]



German soldiers disembark without resistance
at Copenhagen harbor on April 9, 1940.

A crewman of another shore battery testified, “We didn't have a single man who would have been able to operate the cannon.” The German troops landed unmolested and occupied the capital. The day before, the government had received a report that German forces were massing at Flensburg, a city near the Danish frontier. When the invasion began, the Stauning administration stated in a proclamation, “It is the people’s duty to offer no resistance against these troops."[27] It ordered the Danish army to stand down. This evoked bitterness among soldier and civilian alike. The public suspected that the government had sabotaged national defense in collusion with the Germans. One Dane recalled, “Many young people

had already been disappointed over political developments in Denmark for a long time.... The political system the government represented finally lost our confidence."[28]

Holland, another constitutional monarchy, Germany invaded the following month. The Dutch parliament underfunded the military; shortages of uniforms and small arms compelled recruits to wear a motley combination of army tunics and civilian caps and often to substitute wooden staffs for rifles when standing post. One Dutchman wrote, “Because of the general disinterest in the army, also manifest among politicians, not a single cadet enrolled in the Imperial Military Academy during 1935 and 1936."[29] Dutch pacifists lobbied to have the army disbanded. The German armed forces required just five days to break its resistance.

France, a pioneer of democracy, displayed weaknesses that one might attribute to the influence of liberalism’s emphasis on the individual. Lieutenant Pierre Mendès-France observed this upon returning home from Syria only days before the Germans invaded his country on May 10, 1940: “Everyone, civilians as well as those in the military, had but one thing on their minds; to arrange their personal affairs as well as possible, to get through this seemingly endless period with little or no risk, loss or discomfort.” On May 18, with the French army already reeling before the German offensive, General Gamelin wrote this to France’s prime minister: “The German success is most of all the result of physical training and of the lofty moral attitude of the people. The French soldier, the private citizen of yesterday, never believed there would be war. Often his interests did not reach beyond his work bench, his office or his farm. Inclined to habitually criticize anyone in authority, and demanding on the pretext of civilization the right to live a comfortable existence from day to day, those capable of bearing arms never received the moral or patriotic upbringing between the two wars that would have prepared them for the drama that would decide the fate of their country."[30]

Inadequate defense preparations, craven leadership and moral deficiency were not the only factors causing Western Europeans to lose confidence in the parliamentary system or in democracy. English conduct during the fighting left a bad impression. Retreating across Belgium and Northern France toward Dunkirk, demolition parties of the British

Expeditionary Force destroyed bridges, warehouses, refineries, fuel dumps, harbor installations, and anything else presumed potentially useful to the advancing German army. A Belgian sergeant described, for example, how on May 27 his men saw British troops destroying food stores: "Worst of all was that refugees were there also, who had not eaten for days. They watched English soldiers throw eggs against the walls of houses, stomp on biscuits, and split tinned preserves with axes."[31]

Germany and France concluded an armistice on June 22, 1940. The agreement stated that the "German government . . . does not intend to use the French battle fleet in wartime for its own purposes," acknowledging that the French need the warships "to safeguard their interests in their colonial sphere."[32] On July 3, a British Royal Navy squadron steamed from Gibraltar to the French Algerian anchorage at Mers-el-Kebir. The English demanded that the French battle fleet moored there join them, to continue fighting Germany, or scuttle the ships. When French Admiral Marcel Gensoul refused the ultimatum, the British bombarded his fleet.



At Dunkirk in June 1940, personnel of the Germans' Relief Train *Bayern* provide meals for French refugees.

The battleship *Bretagne* sank, the *Provence* and the *Dunkerque* suffered serious damage, and the barrage cost 1,147 French sailors their lives.[33]

Royal Navy torpedo planes raided the harbor again on July 6, killing another 150 seamen. Two days later, British naval forces attacked Dakar, damaging the French battleship *Richelieu*. All this evoked strong anti-English sentiment throughout France.

Britain extended her nautical blockade of foodstuffs to include European countries occupied by the German army, creating hardships for the populations. London established sham "governments in exile" for these states. They consisted of democratic politicians, officers, and aristocrats who had deserted their country and fled to Britain, in most cases when the fighting was still going on. Entirely dependent on England for their existence, these administrations supposedly represented the true interests of Europe.

The United States also sought to indirectly influence European affairs. On February 9, 1940, the U.S. State Department announced an economic plan for post-war Europe. According to Secretary of State Hull, America would support the principle European currencies through loans backed by gold. This would supposedly regenerate commerce once peace returned. It was apparent that Washington was intent on eradicating Germany's burgeoning international barter system and restoring trade based on gold as the medium of exchange.

The State Department relied on the counsel of American bankers when preparing the plan, not consulting representatives of the continent it was intended for. Other resolutions and proposals for post-war reconstruction followed, such as the Atlantic Charter, the Keynes Plan, the Morgenthau Plan, and economic conferences in Hot Springs in 1943 and in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in July 1944. The Bretton Woods session established the International Monetary Fund in order to influence and if possible regulate foreign economies after the war, bringing the world one step closer to Roosevelt's vision of a global government. In a speech in Königsberg on July 7, Walter Funk, the Reich's minister of economics, told European economists, "Today the Americans are propagating a return to the gold standard. What this means, especially considering this country's dominant hoard of gold, is nothing but an elevation of the dollar to the basis for currencies worldwide and a claim to absolute control of the world's economy."[34] A German diplomat pointed out, "The prerequisite for practical implementation of such plans is the conquest of Europe by the

other side."[35]

German propaganda capitalized on the subjective character of these programs. *Germanisches Leitheft*, a periodical targeting a broad-based European readership, asked in its January 1941 issue, “Will foreign powers and racially alien forces determine Europe’s fate for all time to come, or will Europe form her own future, through her own vitality and on her own responsibility?"[36] Another German publication stated, “One of the main deficiencies in the mentality of the American is that he has no clear comprehension of other peoples. For this reason, he shrugs off their rights and natural requirements for life with a wave of the hand. He claims the prerogative to dictate his boundless wishes to the rest of the world, thanks to an unrivaled sense of superiority."[37]

German leaders realized that to win European support, they would have to offer a viable alternative to the Anglo-American agenda. The most immediate requirement was to regulate the continental economy to become as self-sufficient and cooperative as possible. The British endeavored to starve or make destitute the populations of states under German occupation, in order to lend impetus to resistance cells. Werner Daitz, economic advisor in the NSDAP Foreign Policy Branch, submitted a memorandum in May 1940 urging establishment of a trade commission to explore Germany’s options: “The present blockade has unavoidably made necessary the formation of a continental European economy under German leadership, as an economic self-help measure. . . . If we expect to direct Europe’s commerce, which is absolutely essential to economically strengthen the continent that is the mainstay of the white race, then we must naturally not publicly declare this to be a *German* economic sphere. We must always speak only of Europe."[38]

As the ranking industrial power, only Germany could organize a prosperous and independent continental economy. The September 1940 edition of *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte (National Socialist Monthly)* stated, “Without the Reich, a European community of nations can never be established. . . . The Reich is the great political mission of the German people. It represents the concept of a European order. It eliminates foreign influences and guards against powers hostile to Europe. It strives for European cooperation on the principle of ethnic kinship, and of

productive labor as the substance and foundation of all life."[39]

One of Germany's more astute propagandists was Major Walther Gehl, who served in the infantry in both world wars. He recognized that securing his country's influence depended not on military conquest, but on gaining the popular support of neighboring peoples. In *Die Sendung des Reiches (The Mission of the Reich)*, he wrote that in order for Germany to succeed, she would have to devote herself to the welfare of the continent and not vice versa: "With a sacred sense of responsibility for the future of Europe, Germany will incorporate the natural rights of the other peoples into her own political ambitions, and hold a protective, not ruling hand over them. And her military protection is a better guarantee for perpetuating their sovereign culture than are anti-German alliances with nations beyond our continent."[40]



Walther Gehl, an infantry battalion commander and army propagandist who argued for European unity against the continent's lingering nationalist barriers.

Germanisches Leitheft maintained that the "Reich does not mean domination, but responsibility and a sense of mission; not hegemony, but a unifying inspiration of our clans, particular nations and ethnically-related families."[41] Thus far-sighted Germans advocated the need for the transition from the German Reich into a European Reich. Franz Six, director of ideological research in the SS, wrote that "Common racial ancestry, despite political and ideological differences, is the binding element of the European nations."[42]

One Dane recalled, "Young people receptive to this biologically-based perception correspondingly adjusted their attitude toward foreign

peoples. This led to a genuine broadening of the national sense of belonging. It was the starting point for renewing the 1,100 year-old idea of a unified Europe." Many such Western Europeans sought an opportunity to "help build a better, stronger, and wealthier Europe."[43]

With Hitler's approval, the SS established recruiting offices in Oslo, The Hague and Copenhagen in April and May 1940. Several hundred Norwegian, Danish, and Dutch volunteers signed on for a pre-military training course. Lasting months, the course included weapons firing, sports, German language instruction, and ideological lectures. Conducted in Kärnten, Germany, it also acquainted participants with the indigenous population. Upon conclusion of the course, officers invited the young Europeans to enlist in the SS as Germanic volunteers.



Germanic volunteers wave goodbye as they leave their homeland for recruit training in Germany.

Beyond the allure of a unified continent and disenchantment with previous democratic administrations, economic factors contributed to a gradual rapprochement with Germany. Many unemployed Scandinavians and Western Europeans sought work in the Reich. The Germans registered 100,000 Hollanders who migrated and found jobs in Germany.[44] Denmark recorded 147,000 men out of work in the summer of 1940.[45] The unemployment rate was 18 percent.

Germany helped revive industry in Belgium and in the Netherlands by awarding armaments contracts to manufacturing companies there. The cooperative attitude of the workers, many of whose plant managers had fled to Britain, led the Germans to implement measures to improve labor's social conditions.[46] Unemployment in France, the largest foreign producer for the German war industry, dropped to practically nil by 1943. Having grappled with Communist trade unions before the war, French industrialists favored collaboration with the Germans. They also recognized that France and her colonies were too small a market for the country's modern, expansive industry, and sought to cultivate European clientele.[47]

The NSDAP's foreign policy chief, Alfred Rosenberg, argued in a speech that Europeans should acquiesce to German leadership in continental affairs: "A smaller nation does not relinquish its honor by subordinating itself to a more numerous people and a larger realm. We must acknowledge the laws of life to survive. The facts of life show that there are numerically, geographically and politically powerful nations and there are smaller ones. To accept the influence of a realm like that of the Germans, demonstrating its former strength after years of hard trials, is not a sign of weak character or of questionable honor, but a recognition of the laws of life."[48]

The German army instructed its soldiers garrisoning conquered countries to assume a firm but cordial posture. Guidelines for soldiers stationed in Denmark stated, "Every German in Denmark must always be conscious that he represents the German Reich, and that Germany will be judged by his conduct. When meeting Danes, avoid anything that could insult the Danish national honor. The Danish woman is to be treated respectfully. Avoid political arguments."[49] These circumstances reaped benefits for the Germans. According to a 1947 Gallup poll, 40 percent of Danes canvassed had been outspokenly sympathetic toward Germany. Just 32 percent had felt hostile.[50]

Late in 1940, the Waffen SS established its first division incorporating Germanic volunteers. Flemish and Dutch enrolled in the *Westland* regiment, while *Nordland* recruited Norwegians and Danes. Joined by the seasoned VT regiment *Germania*, these formations merged into the 5th

Waffen SS division *Wiking* (Viking). The roster included 400 Finns, plus smaller contingents from Switzerland and Sweden.[51] Hausser later observed, “They thought beyond the boundaries of their national states toward something greater, a common purpose."[52] A post-war poll of surviving Dutch SS men summarized that “the better educated were fascinated by the Reich concept, with its prospect of the consolidation of all Germanic peoples."[53] The Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell saw their commitment as proof that “there could be a civilization based not on birth or on the privilege of wealth, but on community spirit.... They sought new values which could guarantee the state’s cohesion, and this disavowal of materialism excited, fulfilled and influenced the spirit of many Europeans —and not just the least prominent among them.” [54]



A company of the SS regiment *Westland* in formation, in a photo released to the press in April 1941. Around 20,000 Dutchmen joined the Waffen SS. Most fought against the Soviets. Some helped the Germans repulse an Allied airborne landing at Arnhem in September 1944.

The German cause, groping for acceptance among European populations, gained favor when war broke out with the Soviet Union in June 1941. Hitler authorized a Waffen SS proposal to establish national legions of volunteers from neighboring states to fight in the East. Opening on June 27, recruiting offices counted 40,000 applicants the first day. The German security police, the SD, circulated a confidential analysis to leading representatives of the Reich's government and the NSDAP on the reaction in the occupied countries. It reported "a direct reversal in attitudes in Germany's favor" in Denmark: "Prominent people in Danish business life and in the clergy, who had up till now been reserved or even hostile toward Germany, are changing their position on Germany now that she has

begun the battle for European civilization against Soviet Russia. . . . Applications to join the Waffen SS have markedly increased."[55]

One recruit, among the 6,000 Danes to serve in the Waffen SS, recalled how many of his countrymen feared that were Germany defeated, “Denmark could suffer the same fate as the small Baltic states; degraded to a Russian military district, politically neutralized, forcible implementation of the Communist bureaucratic economic system, gradual *Russianization*, and deportation of the political and cultural elite, with ruinous consequences for the biological substance of the Danish people."[56] The Danish government founded the *Freikorps Danmark* (Denmark Volunteer Corps) on July 3, 1941, which granted authorized absence, without forfeiture of seniority or pension, to members of the Danish army who transferred to the new formation.[57] Its first commanding officer, Christian Kryssing, stated in a national radio speech in July, “Regardless of our political affiliations, we all feel that Bolshevism and its threat to the northern states must be destroyed....I call upon all Danish men capable of bearing arms to take part in this crusade... to secure a rightful place for our fatherland in the reformation of Europe."[58]

In Amsterdam, 50,000 people attended an anti-Communist rally in support of the German war effort. Regarding Scandinavia, the SD reported, “The German-Russian conflict has turned attitudes in Norway more favorably toward Germany. . . . There are countless volunteers for the SS *Nordland* regiment.” In Belgium, “Flemish nationalist circles are unconditionally on Germany’s side in the struggle against Bolshevism."[59] Eventually over 20,000 Flemish served in the Waffen SS, many joining to combat “the arch-enemy of Christian Europe” in the East.[60] The Swiss journalist Armin Mohler wrote, “They came because they hoped for the German Reich to forge a unified Europe of free nations. They wanted neither a commissar state nor a society of everyone competing against one another. There was much idealism then, such as is really only possible among the young."[61]

In Paris, French politicians met on July 7 to discuss formation of the *Legion des Volontaires Francais* (Legion of French Volunteers), or LVF. The resulting fighting force left to deploy against the Soviets in August 1941. Within months a sponsorship program, “Friends of the Legion,” gained 1.5

million supporters.[62] The rector of the Catholic University of Paris, Alfred Cardinal Baudrillart, called the volunteers “among the best sons of France.” They defended not only the honor of their country, he stated, but “fight also for the Christian civilization of the continent. . . . This legion is in fact in its own way a new knighthood. These legionnaires are the crusaders of the 20th Century."[63]

Jacques Benoist-Mechin, a cabinet minister in the government of unoccupied France, regarded a pan-European war effort against the USSR as “the platform upon which provincial patriotisms can bond together, free from antagonism and traditional rivalries. It is the vehicle to break nationalism’s inner conflicts, to develop into a European super-nationalism."[64]

The threat of Soviet expansion was a genuine concern to Europeans, who were more familiar with the consequences of earlier Communist revolutions in Russia, Germany, Hungary, and Spain than were the people of Britain and the United States. German correspondents covering the advance of the fighting forces into Russian territory filled the news media with reports about destitute living conditions among populations under the hammer and sickle as well as the merciless treatment of political dissidents there.

An article published in the *Volkischer Beobachter* in August 1941 expressed more or less popular views about the Soviet menace: “Today all Europe knows that the war against Bolshevism is Europe’s own decisive struggle, the consolidated war of European civilized nations against the powers of destruction and formless chaos. A new, revitalized Europe has learned to grasp what an enormous danger the specter of Bolshevism represents. It is of symbolic significance that the unity of Europe has begun to take place and prove itself in this struggle.

“We know only too well what this war is about. But only when one sees the reality of the Bolshevik regime face to face, the influence of this system on the individual person and on his life, only then can one comprehend the cruelty, the overall horror of this system. It is a system that combines every element of devastation and absolute ruin of human values and ruin of humanity itself. Bolshevism is not even a political system one can intellectually debate with, but the organized murder of

all life, the degradation of the earth and its people, destruction for the sake of destroying!"[65] Regardless of their personal attitude toward Germany, the war against the Soviet Union was in part a unifying factor out of necessity for Europeans.

French, Walloon, and Spanish volunteers served in the Germany army, in ethnic regiments commanded by officers of their own nationality. French and Walloon troops eventually transferred to the Waffen SS. Berger arranged for German drill instructors conducting recruit training to attend special courses to acquaint themselves with the national and religious customs of the inductees in their charge. SS Colonel Richard Schulze recalled, "The instructors needed to summon sympathy and understanding, and a well-balanced acceptance of the mentality of the various nations."[66] In a September 1941 article, an SS combat correspondent described the Odyssey of foreign volunteers serving in the *Wiking* division: "They came to us, misunderstood by their countrymen, not in proud columns but individually, resolute and clear-minded, often against father, mother, and family. They are not strangers here, but through their blood and their deeds have found in their regiments honor, a rightful place, and a home."[67]

Negative Nationalism

Germanic volunteers often experienced isolation from their countrymen, thanks to lingering ambivalence among the populations of the occupied lands toward Germany. Traditional international rivalries, a saturation of anti-German publicity in the pre-war democratic press, suspicion of Hitler's motives and the German invasion of 1940 all retarded appeals for European unity. Another obstacle to cooperation and good will, ironically, sprung from the Reich itself. Powerful and numerous, it was unavoidable that the Germans would exercise great influence over European affairs. Prominent nationalists in the country believed that this entitled them to subordinate the interests of neighboring states to those of Germany.

In June 1940, the German government introduced proposals to restructure European commerce. Addressing members of the planning committee, Funk offered this guideline: "Germany now possesses the

power in Europe to implement a reorganization of the economy according to her requirements. The political will to use this power is on hand. It therefore follows that the countries must fall in line behind us. The economy of other European lands must suit our needs." Foreign observers heard Funk state in a speech in July, "Future peacetime commerce must guarantee the Greater German Reich a maximum of economic security, and the German people a maximum of consumer goods to elevate the national economy. European trade is to be aligned with this goal."[68]



Walter Funk, German minister of economics, with Hitler. Funk's initially one-sided policies alienated Europeans in the occupied countries. Saluting at left is Heinz Guderian. Wilhelm Keitel is at right.

Based on a 1939 study by the Prussian jurist Carl Schmitt, National Socialist officials proposed granting sovereignty only to countries populated by "ethnically worthwhile peoples." The German commissioner for occupied Holland, Seyss-Inquart, championed similar views. Party zealots considered him a better choice for foreign minister than the pragmatic, more constructive Ribbentrop. In his essay, "The European Order," Seyss-Inquart wrote of "a natural ranking, in which every nation has a place in the community according to its economic capabilities, its biological vitality, its martial strength, and cultural value." He called upon Europeans to "acknowledge the Reich as the principle power, through

which their own strength can best be realized." He added that Germany, "through superior achievement is accorded higher responsibility for all" who comprise European civilization, "which was formed by the industriousness of the Nordic race."[69]

Such one-sided proposals regarding post-war Europe dismayed Ribbentrop. He warned in a memo that Germany's allies fear that after the war, Berlin will place a German governor in every country. Neutrals, he wrote, are concerned that Germany plans to annex them.[70] The notion of ranking European peoples according to their value, racial or ethnic heritage among the criteria, threatened to create the divisions Hitler had previously sought to avoid in Germany proper when combating the party's race theorists.

In the occupied countries, attitudes of German superiority were often apparent at lower administrative levels. Lvov for example, was a Polish-Ukrainian city the German army wrested from the Soviets in June 1941. It subsequently came under the Reich's civil jurisdiction. An ethnic German resident there recalled, "The passenger compartments of the street cars were divided in the middle by wide leather tubing. A sign in the front section read, 'Only for Germans and their allies – Italians, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Rumanians.' It was shameful to see how people were crowded together in the rear section, while up front sat perhaps two people, and one or two policemen stood on the platform or beside the engineer."[71]

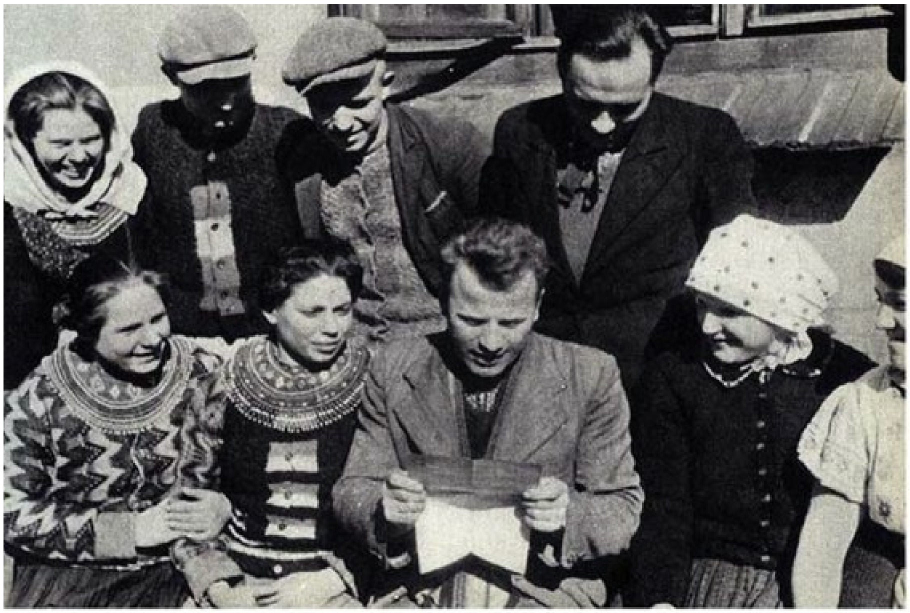
Though Hitler had decided to gradually release all Polish prisoners of war, German authorities discouraged fraternization. In a 1939 assessment, the SD faulted members of the armed forces for their "great broad mindedness and sympathy" toward the Poles, especially former Austrian officers for their "respectful attitude." The German military command then ordered that Poles clear the sidewalk for German soldiers and remove their hats when passing officers; however, few occupational troops enforced this tactless regulation.[72] In the west, Hitler detained 65,000 Walloon prisoners of war, while sending all Flemish captives home. Germany continued to hold one-and-a-half-million French soldiers prisoner.

The war demanded that the Germans abandon such counterproductive policies. The Reich's disorganized armaments industry experienced a

decline in weapons manufacture during 1941. Production of howitzers, artillery rounds and small arms ammunition substantially dropped between February and December. The factories could not keep pace with the quantity of ordnance being lost in the Russian campaign. As the Red Army retreated in the east, the Soviets dismantled and evacuated 1,360 industrial plants. Their demolition squads destroyed remaining facilities, including 95 percent of the Ukraine's power works, plus granaries, warehouses, refineries, bridges and machinery. The Germans were able to partially restore the economy at considerable cost, investing far more in reconstruction than they were able to reap in raw materials and surplus grain. These circumstances placed an enormous burden on German resources.[73]

There were seven-and-a-half million foreign workers in the Reich by September 1944. These included prisoners of war, the voluntarily recruited, and eventually those impressed into the work force. Northern and Western Europeans received the same pay, vacation time and health care benefits as German labor. Eastern Europeans suffered poor treatment. Fritz Sauckel, in charge of mobilizing labor, stated in December 1942 that "whipped, undernourished and cowed eastern workers will more burden the German economy than be of use to it." A decree enacted by Himmler that month made abuse of foreign laborers by Germans a punishable offence. Only as the military situation worsened, did conditions for Russian and Ukrainian workers improve.[74]

Poles fared better, largely due to the value of Polish industry for the war economy. Decent treatment of foreign labor, plus the re-organization of the entire armaments industry by civilian officials, led to a dramatic improvement in output. Between December 1941 and June 1944, armaments manufacture increased 230 percent, though the work force was augmented by just 28 percent. In 1944 alone, German industry produced enough ordnance to fully equip 225 infantry and 45 panzer divisions. German factories accounted for 88 percent of arms production, foreign contracts for the balance.[75] A unified Europe, based on good will and equal status for all countries, was now a necessity.



Poles migrating to Germany found employment in the agrarian economy and eventually in the armaments industry as well. Food rations and housing for so-called *Ostarbeiter* (Eastern workers) was generally inferior to that provided for laborers from Western Europe.

Hitler harbored reservations about restructuring Europe with all nations on equal footing. He mistrusted his allies. German intelligence reported that after German defeats in 1943, Rumania, Hungary, Finland and Bulgaria discreetly contacted London and Washington about concluding a separate peace. The Allies informed them that the USSR must be involved in the negotiations, leading Germany's satellites to drop the initiative. The Führer was no less wary of Philippe Petain, president of unoccupied "Vichy" France, who proved unsympathetic to the German cause.

Hitler limited the roster of the Legion of French Volunteers to 15,000 men, even though there was available manpower to quadruple the number. The contemporary historian Franz Seidler pointed out, "Hitler feared losing his freedom to make decisions about regulating post-war Europe if he accepted foreign help."[76] When the Walloon Legion officer Degrelle addressed Belgian workers in the Berlin *Sportspalast* in January 1943, he received acclaim from his audience . . . and a total press blackout in the German media. Recognizing German policy as an obstruction to the rapprochement supported by many of his countrymen, the French politician Laval told Hitler, "You want to win the war to create

Europe. You must create Europe to win the war."[77]

At the time of Degrelle's Berlin speech, the German armed forces and their allies were already losing ground in a war of attrition against Russia, Britain, and the United States. More Germans saw the need for foreign assistance. This required rethinking the Reich's continental attitude. In February 1943, the foreign policy advisor Dr. Kolb introduced proposals for multilateral cooperation. He recommended that treaties be concluded upon the basis of absolute equality of the signatories. A nation should enjoy parity in the European community regardless of its form of government. Kolb's plan required Germany to relinquish hegemony over the continent.[78]

In September 1943, Arnold Köster, head of the planning commission of the armaments ministry, bluntly stated in a memorandum that the Reich conducts an improvised exploitation of the occupied territories. The result was "resentment among society's elements of good will, mounting hatred among hostile strata of the populations, passive resistance, and sabotage."79 The German diplomat Cecil von Renthe-Fink reported to Ribbentrop on September 9, "It is obvious that the mood in Europe has been worse for some time and that resistance movements are growing rapidly. This development can have dire consequences for the willingness of the European nations to commit their resources for our victory, and must be countered."[79]

Renthe-Fink considered one of the worst shortcomings to be the fact that "apart from what is occasionally stated about the economic field, we have so far avoided saying anything more concrete about our intentions. This gives the impression that we want to keep our hands free to implement our own political plans after the war."[80] Attending a wartime lecture on the danger of Communism, Degrelle voiced pan-European concerns when he told the speaker that the volunteers understand what they are fighting against, but not what they are fighting *for*.

German occupational policy in former Soviet territory was counterproductive. Aware of the threat that eastern populations such as the Mongols had historically posed, Hitler preferred to keep them politically impotent. He stated during a military conference in June 1943, "I cannot set any future objective that would establish independent states

here, autonomous states."[81] He privately remarked in April 1942, “To master the peoples east of the Reich whom we have conquered, the guiding principle must be to accommodate the wishes for individual freedom as far as possible, avoid any organized state form, and in this way hold the members of these nationalities to as limited a standard of civilization as possible."[82]

The *Völkischer Beobachter* mirrored this contempt for the Russians, as in the following description of a group of Soviet prisoners, published in a July 1942 edition: “We all know him from the newsreels; this earth-colored, leathery face with the apathetic, furtive animal gaze and the wearied, mechanical motions; this grey, monotonous, nameless mass, this herd in the truest sense of the word."[83]

Thousands of Russians deserted to the invaders, often giving the reason that Stalin had executed someone in their family.[84] In July 1941, out of 12,000 members of the Soviet 229th Rifle Division, 8,000 jumped ship. In September, 11,000 men belonging to the 255th, 270th, and 275th Rifle Divisions went over the hill as well.[85] Desertions continued to plague the Red Army. In May 1942 alone, 10,962 Soviet soldiers crossed over to the Germans. Another 9,136 followed in June, then 5,453 in July. The Germans counted 15,011 Red Army deserters in August.[86]



Men of the Red Army who surrendered. Classified as deserters by Stalin, many saw no choice but to collaborate with the enemy. Over a million Russians entered German service during the war.

In May 1943, 90 Russian battalions, 140 independent rifle companies, 90 battalions consisting of non-Russian troops such as Georgians and Tartars, plus over 400,000 unarmed auxiliaries served in the German armed forces.[87] A Cossack division and several regiments supplemented this military force. At least 500,000 former Soviets fought on the German side that year[88], and Cossacks were especially effective in combating Communist partisans. Hitler was initially shocked by the number of Russian units in German army service, and in February 1942, forbade more to be established. He soon gave up his resistance to the practice, thanks to the achievements of these formations.

Since the beginning of the Soviet-German war, captured Russian officers repeatedly advised the invaders that the establishment and formal recognition of a Russian national state with its own army of liberation was essential to overthrow the Stalin regime. Officers testifying included former commanders of the 3rd Guards Army, the 5th, 12th, 19th and 22nd Armies and more than a dozen other generals. The German diplomat Hilger interviewed three prominent Russian prisoners in August 1942: General Andrei Vlassov, Colonel Vladimir Soyersky, and Regimental Commissar Joseph Kerness. Vlassov himself told Hilger, "Soviet government propaganda has managed to persuade every Russian that Germany wants to destroy Russia's existence as an independent state. . . . The Russian people's resistance can only be broken if they are shown that Germany pursues no such objective, but is moreover willing to guarantee Russia and the Ukraine . . . an independent existence."[89]

Hilger recorded Colonel Soyersky as stating that "Stalin, because of continuous defeats he is considered responsible for, has lost all his popularity in the army. The Soviet regime has always been hated by the broad mass of the population." Soyersky also opined that publicly defining German war aims favorable to Russia would lead to the "immediate collapse" of Red Army and national resistance.

At this stage, Hitler, his influential chancery director Martin Bormann, and Reich's Commissioner for the Ukraine Erich Koch opposed post-war Russian autonomy. Italian Marshal Giovanni Messe observed, "Germany has not understood how to awaken the sympathy and willingness to cooperate among the populations of the occupied territories."[90] Hitler's mistrust of Germany's treaty partners and of the eastern peoples obstructed a rational European policy.

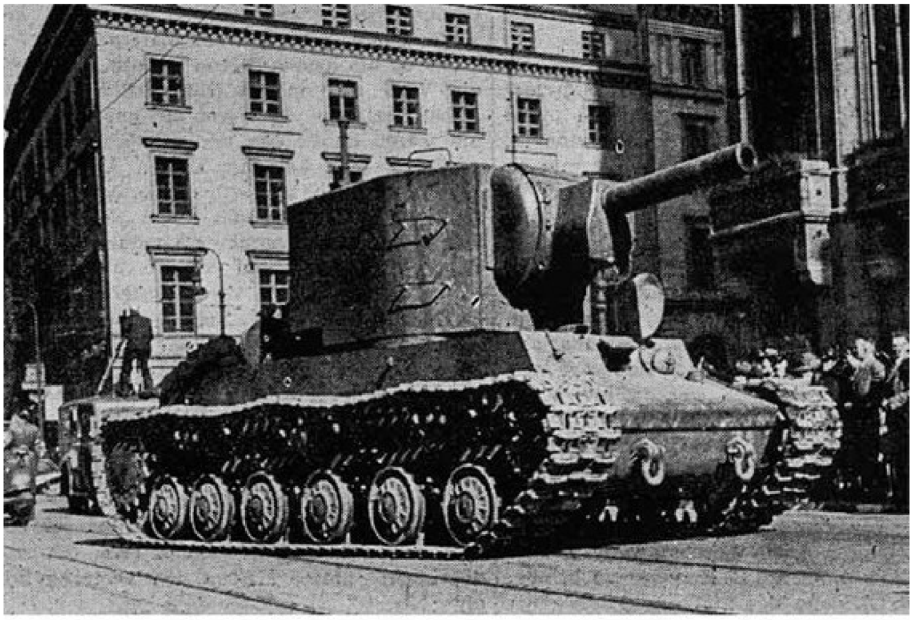
Throughout most of the war, German propaganda vilified the governments of enemy countries while describing their civilian populations and military personnel as decent but duped by unscrupulous leaders. The Reich's media revised this prudential practice with respect to the war in the East. When the Germans invaded, the Soviet secret police, the GPU, liquidated political prisoners in eastern Poland and in the Baltic States. The Germans discovered over 4,000 victims in Lvov, in Luck 1,500, in Dubno 500. Summarizing the German official inquiry, Dr. Philipp Schneider wrote, "Without any doubt, those murdered were tortured

before their death in a sadistic way. Torture chambers built especially for the purpose were used."[91]

Along retreat routes, the GPU and the Red Army strew mutilated bodies of German prisoners shot or tortured to death. The purpose was to provoke reprisals against surrendering Russians by the invaders, thereby deterring desertion. In the Tarnopol jail, German troops found one of their missing bomber crews with eyes gouged out, tongues, ears and noses cut off, and the skin on the hands and feet peeled away. This was a favorite GPU torment accomplished by first immersing the appendages in boiling water.

During January 1942, the Soviet Black Sea fleet landed Russian marines along the German-occupied section of the Crimean coast near Odessa. An engineer with a German infantry division there recalled this: “Many houses along the beach had served as hospitals or as collection areas for the wounded. The Russians entered, killed the orderlies and the physicians, and raped the nurses and female assistants. Then they threw the women into the ice-cold waters of the harbor basin. They shot the wounded and sick soldiers, or dragged them into the street and poured cold water over them, so that they would freeze to death in the outdoors."[92]

The German press described GPU agents and Soviet soldiers committing atrocities as *Untermenschen*. The expression literally translates as “lowly persons,” but historians sometimes interpret it as meaning subhuman or racially inferior. It in fact refers to the depravity of the individual mind and spirit, the triumph of corruption over the refined qualities of civilized man. Beyond the Soviet troops, Stalin’s enforcers, and rank-and-file Russian Communists, the word more or less became associated with the eastern peoples in general.



A captured Russian KV-2 tank parades through Berlin on May 8, 1942, to advertise the opening of the "Soviet Paradise" exhibit in the city's *Lustgarten*. The exhibit portrayed social misery and Communist oppression in the USSR.

Melitta Wiedemann, editor of the diplomatic journal *Die Aktion*, expressed the frustration over German propaganda and foreign policy felt among many prominent citizens. In 1943, she wrote to several SS leaders, advocating the pan-European idea and a revision of German practices in the East. She directed a letter to Himmler via his advisor on October 5, in which she maintained, "Our silence over the future form of the new Europe is considered in the occupied territories and among those who are officially our friends to be absolute proof of our wicked intentions." Wiedemann added, "First the Jews were declared *Untermenschen* and deprived of their rights. Then the Poles joined them, then the Russians, and very nearly the Norwegians as well. Who's protecting any nationality from being relegated to the realm of *Untermenschen* by Germany and then destroyed?"

She continued, "Our *Untermensch* slogan has helped Stalin proclaim a national war. . . . The entire Russian farming community, most of the intelligentsia, and the senior leadership of the Red Army are enemies of Bolshevism and especially of Stalin. Our policy confronts these people with a tragic dilemma; either fight for Stalin, or abandon their people, surely among the most talented of the white race . . . to the fate of a destitute,

looted colonial territory."[93]



This ramshackle worker's dwelling from Minsk appeared in the "Soviet Paradise" exhibit. German engineers had dismantled the house, shipped it to Berlin, and reassembled it for display. According to the German press, the summer exhibit attracted over a million visitors.

The German army suffered a catastrophic defeat at the six-month battle of Stalingrad, which ended in February 1943. This forced many Germans to the conclusion that without active foreign help, the war would be lost, which required a fundamentally new approach to the Reich's administration in Europe. To implement such a revision, resisted by the highest state leadership, advocates needed a vehicle, an organized bloc. They found it in the Waffen SS.

The European Mission

Early in the war against Russia, Hitler spoke of the need for Europeans to overcome nationalist proclivities: "The threat from the east alone, with the danger of reducing everyone to the Bolshevik-Asiatic plane, which would mean the destruction of all basis of European civilization, compels us to unify."[94] A prominent journalist and former Waffen SS lieutenant, Hans Schwarz van Berk, wrote later, "The old points of departure of German policy were too provincial to realize the European revival in a

voluntary spirit of freedom, so passionately striven for by activist, optimistic younger elements. . . . Only the foreign units with their clear-cut European will, anchored in the perception of the SS as the European fighting elite, changed this. . . . This war's fury demanded more than hired mercenaries. It demanded constructive, common goals and binding, idealistic motives of the fighters."[95]

Germanic volunteers in the Reich's service did not consider themselves to be in a subordinate role. "We fought neither for Germany nor for Hitler, but for a much greater idea; the creation of a united states of Europe," wrote Degrelle.[96] "We were all unified by the same will: Honorably represent our nation among the 30 that came to fight. Do our duty, since we fought for Europe. Gain an honorable place for our fatherland in the continental community that would evolve from the war, and finally, create combat units whose value guaranteed achieving social justice, when we ultimately returned home after the end of hostilities."[97]

The Swiss SS man Heinrich Büeler recalled, "Regarding the restructuring of Europe after the war, there was no program. This question was nevertheless often discussed in the Waffen SS. . . . We were certain that the struggle against Asiatic Bolshevism, and the camaraderie joining Germanics and Europeans, will lead to reforming Europe in the same spirit." The Swiss journalist Francois Lobsiger considered the men "political soldiers in the loftiest sense," fighting to achieve a "strong, unified, and brotherly Europe."[98] The historian Lothar Greil summarized, "With the beginning of the Russian campaign, a decisive mental awareness developed within the Waffen SS: The fight for freedom for the realm of all Germans became a struggle for the freedom of the European family of nations. The common cause of volunteers from throughout Europe reinforced this ideal."[99] The French historian Henri Landemer concluded that within the Waffen SS, "The Reich is no longer Germany but Europe."[100]



Soldiers of the SS *Wiking* division unwind after a mission against the Red Army. They wear camouflage smocks, still a novelty in warfare.

Himmler, primarily involved in law enforcement, intelligence gathering and counter-espionage, initially envisioned a post-war Europe with Germany dominant. He harbored a colonial attitude toward the East. Influenced not only by the deteriorating military situation but by many letters he received from soldiers of the Waffen SS, he gradually abandoned this imperialistic viewpoint. In a 1943 speech to NSDAP officials in Posen, he described the brotherhood in arms of the *Wiking* division, in which Germans and non-Germans served together, as the basis for the greater Germanic Reich to come.

When a local party functionary refused to approve the application for marriage of a Germanic volunteer to a German woman, Himmler reacted

sharply. On October 4, 1943, he sent a letter to Bormann arguing, "If on one hand the *Reichsführer* SS (Himmler's title) is supposed to recruit Flemish, Dutch, and other Germanics to fight and die . . . and in return declare that they have equal rights, then marriage to the sisters and daughters of these Germanics, or of a German maiden to a member of these Germanic peoples, cannot be forbidden." Demanding that the NSDAP's Racial Policy Office be deprived of the authority to license marriages, Himmler added, "It makes no sense for me to try for years, under difficult circumstances, to animate a Germanic idea and win people for it, while other offices in Germany thoughtlessly and categorically make it all for nothing."[101]

Despite the authority of his office, Himmler was navigating precarious waters. He advocated a European commonwealth, challenging official "Germany first" programs and NSDAP dogma. "He became the most demonstrative critic of this policy and tacitly the most significant enemy of all supporters and defenders of this policy," stated Schwarz van Berk.[102] Himmler began gaining the upper hand early in 1943. In February, the Reich's Chancery granted him supervision over all "mutual ethnic-Germanic affairs" in the occupied countries. German officials could no longer act on related issues unless "in agreement with the *Reichsführer* SS." The historian Seidler observed, "To shape the new order in Europe after the war, the SS had an optimal starting position in competition with organs of the NSDAP."[103] The SS planned to establish a European union with close economic cooperation and a universal currency system, without German domination. "The loyalty of the foreign SS men gave Himmler more weight . . . in opposing official German policy. These men were not in the slightest degree of a subservient nature," wrote Schwarz van Berk.[104] Eventually non-Germans became the majority in half of the SS combat divisions in active service.[105]

The Waffen SS took control of all foreign legions serving in the German army in 1944 except for Cossacks. This was an important step in supplanting the concept of national armies with that of a multi-national fighting force defending common interests, a force whose veterans could maintain a camaraderie transcending customary European rivalries after the war. The Waffen SS actively promoted establishment of a Russian army of liberation. After meeting with Vlassov, Himmler approved not only the

formation of this army but the founding of an "exile" Russian government. Vlassov stated that he found greater understanding for his proposals during negotiations with the SS than with the German army.[106] He ultimately received the green light to establish the Russian army of liberation, which deployed toward the end of the war.

Estonians and Latvians became the vanguard of eastern peoples donning the uniform of the Waffen SS. Not without reservations, Himmler eventually acquiesced to Berger's appeal to enroll Ukrainians. Formation of the 14th SS Grenadier Division, together with Yugoslavian contingents, ultimately broke down the "Slav skepticism" that had infected the *Reichsführer* SS no less than NSDAP doctrinaires. The diplomat Renthe-Fink wrote, "The Estonian SS has proven itself in action against the Bolsheviks, and these developments appear to be taking place with the Führer's approval."[107] The former director of the Bad Tölz officer's academy noted, "The N.S. racial concept became less plausible after the forming of Slavic divisions. It gave way to the unifying element of anti-Communism, especially welding together the eastern and western SS."[108]

The example of the Waffen SS encouraged others in Germany opposed to national policies detrimental to a community of nations. In February 1944, the German commissioner in the Crimea, Alfred Frauenfeld, sent Berlin a 37-page memorandum describing National Socialist eastern policy as a "masterpiece of poor management."[109] That June, the economist Walter Labs submitted proposals for administrative reform in occupied Russia. He asked, "Are the eastern territories and the populations residing in them to be accepted as members of the European realm, or are they simply colonies and colonial peoples to be exploited?" Labs demanded they be accorded the right to private property, advanced education and opportunities to realize prosperity. He bluntly pointed out that "nations which achieve as much in wartime as what the Red Army has demonstrated, are too advanced to accept being reduced to the standard of a colonial people."[110]

For its part, the German army issued lengthy guidelines to its troops in Russia in 1943, ordering them to "be fair.... The Russian hates nothing more than injustice. The Russian is an especially good worker; if he is treated decently he works hard. He is intelligent and learns easily."[111]

Nearly two years earlier, the Waffen SS had already instructed its members to “sincerely try to gain a fundamental understanding of the contemporary Russian psyche,” every SS man being “not just a soldier but a bit of a politician.” The purpose, stated in a directive for soldiers of the *Leibstandarte*, was “one of the most important tasks for the German people, namely to win these populations for the European family of nations."[112]



Russian volunteers in the ranks of the German armed forces. The Reich’s news media publicized their commitment, despite Hitler’s misgivings about allowing these fierce fighting men to serve in combat arms.

The *Leibstandarte* defended the Mius River position on the eastern front until April 1942, when it received transfer orders. A grenadier recalled, “During our withdrawal from Taganrog, thousands of residents stood along the road and waved to the units as they drove away; an example of how good the relationship between an SS division and the Russian civilian population could become."[113]

Though better known for its reputation as an elite fighting troop, the Waffen SS was no less resolute in advancing social and political reforms necessary for Europe to recover supremacy and renown in world affairs. In combating both the lingering 19th Century nationalism dividing the continent and the unproductive dogma of the Racial Policy Office within Germany, the Waffen SS trod a solitary path; few among the Reich’s hierarchy risked contradicting the NSDAP’s legislated programs. Albert

Frey, a regimental commander in the *Leibstandarte*, recalled that "during the war, in no other realm of the NS state were the flawed political and military decisions of the senior leadership so openly discussed and criticized as within the Waffen SS." [114] Induction into the Waffen SS of non-German volunteers forced the Reich's Government to recognize the contribution of foreign peoples to the war effort. Germanic recruits demanded a post-war European federation in place of German hegemony. They found political expression through the SS, steadily leading the German government toward a balanced perspective. This augmented the influence of the under-represented strata that did the fighting, much in the sense that the wars of liberation in 1813 began shifting power from the imperial dynasty to the Prussian peasant militia.

Thousands of Ukrainians volunteered to serve in the Waffen SS.[115] The Ukrainian 14th SS Grenadier Division, which the Germans decided to establish in April 1943, went into action the following year. When Hitler learned of its existence he questioned its dependability, suggesting it would be better to give its weapons to a new German division. Hearing of General Vlassov's wish to lead an army of liberation, Hitler retorted, "I'll never form a Russian army. That's a specter of the first order."[116]

When SS Colonel Günther d'Alquen criticized the official attitude degrading the Russians, Himmler expressly warned him against the SS taking any course of action contrary to the Führer's wishes. Yet the Waffen SS prevailed. Again citing Schwarz van Berk, "In Himmler, those demanding that the narrowly defined racial policy be abolished in favor of a broader, more rational interpretation found their strongest voice. And now this same Himmler, who in his own domain once established the most stringent racial criteria, became the advocate of a liberal understanding of the rights of nationalities and races."[117]

Hitler disapproved of the revisions doggedly promoted by the Waffen SS, yet ironically, he had created the system that enabled them to progress. In a 1937 speech at Vogelsang he had once stated, "From our ranks the most capable can reach the loftiest positions without respect to origin and birth. . . .What they've been, what their parents do, who their mother was, mean nothing. If they're capable, the way stands clear. They just have to accept responsibility; that is, have it in them to lead."[118] Hitler's

policy resembled the spirit of 18th Century liberalism in France, in which talented individuals realized their potential and rose to positions of leadership.

Since its establishment in 1934, the VT, the future Waffen SS, attracted men from the untapped wellspring of superior human resources once identified by Gneisenau. Frey, among the first to join the armed SS, wrote that regarding fellow recruits in training at the Ellwangen barracks, “Most were farm lads and came from villages."[119] In the German army, 49 percent of the officer corps hailed from military families. In the VT, the figure was five percent. Just two percent of army officers had rural backgrounds, but a substantial percentage of VT officers grew up on farms.[120] Despite their comparatively limited education, SS officers enrolled in army general staff courses consistently scored in the upper ten percent of graduates.[121] In some German provinces, nearly a third of the farm lads applied to enlist in the VT.

Like the German army, this novel fighting force encouraged battlefield initiative at junior command levels. However, it also relaxed social barriers between officers and subordinates, based authority on winning the men’s respect rather than on rank and instilled a liberal attitude that enabled Germans and other Europeans to stand together as brethren. In a few short years, the Waffen SS contributed to political and military evolutions that might otherwise have taken decades, and without the patronage of the men’s respective governments or populations.

In its final form, the Waffen SS bore little resemblance to the party’s showpiece guard troop, personifying the flower of German manhood, that Hitler originally intended for domestic missions at his discretion. Himmler ultimately acknowledged that “the Waffen SS is beginning to lead a life of its own."[122] Not constrained by established military convention, the men of the Waffen SS approached their craft with a spirit of independence and innovation. Through their voluntary commitment and wartime sacrifices they lobbied for political reform— customarily forbidden waters for the armed forces. And yet its members hailed largely from a stratum historically lacking public influence. Despite the dynamics, boldness and aplomb of the Waffen SS, it never would have gained leverage without a state system in place that fostered discovery of latent ability. The Führer

approved expansion of the Waffen SS despite its defiance. Hitler was a man who sought not to control his people but to guide them, to help them explore, discover, and harness their potential, even when the changes they introduced contradicted his personal beliefs.

Chapter 6

Revolution Versus Reactionary

Fatal Diplomacy

What the Waffen SS could have finally achieved toward a European confederation, what caliber of leadership the Adolf Hitler Schools would have produced, or how education and advancement of Germany's non-affluent classes might have reshaped the nation will never be known. Military defeat in 1945 ended the era of German self-determination, quelling a revolution of historical consequence that may never be emulated. Germany's overthrow we broadly attribute to the larger populations and superior industrial capacity of the Allies, but a seldom-publicized, insidious factor also contributed to the outcome of the war. This was the systematic sabotage, conducted by disaffected, malevolent elements within Germany, of the Reich's peacetime diplomacy and wartime military operations.

Unlike the Bolsheviks, Hitler did not oppress the aristocracy to promote labor. He personally considered the role of the nobility "played out". It would have to prove itself to regain its former prestige, but only by competing against other classes within the parameters of the Reich's social programs. A tract published for officers declared, "The new nobility of the German nation, which is open to every German, is nobility based on accomplishment." [1] Many from the country's titled families accepted the challenge. They enrolled in the NSDAP or the SS or served with valor in the armed forces during the war. A small percentage, concentrated in the army general staff and in the diplomatic corps, resented the social devaluation of their high-born status. Rather than contribute to the new Germany, they conspired against her. Together with a self-absorbed minority of misguided intellectuals, clerics, financiers and Marxists, they intrigued to bring down both the National Socialist government and their country as well.

An especially harmful characteristic of this subversive resistance movement was that its leaders tenanted sensitive positions in public office and in the military. Major players included Leipzig's Mayor Carl Goerdeler, Ribbentrop's subordinates Baron von Weizsäcker, Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin and Erich Kordt, and chief of military intelligence Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. They and their fellow conspirators knew that Hitler was too popular for them to incite a national insurrection against him. They sought assistance beyond Germany's borders, from England. The subversives established contact with British politicians in June 1937. With Canaris providing a smoke screen, Goerdeler covertly travelled to London using foreign currency provided by the banker Schacht. He met with Halifax, Churchill, Eden, Vansittart and Montague Norman of the Bank of England. Goerdeler told his hosts of an approaching "unavoidable confrontation between Hitler and the conspirators," giving the impression that plans for a coup were well under way. [2]

That December, Ribbentrop submitted to Hitler a confidential analysis of attitudes in Britain. He warned that the English were by no means weak and decadent and would go to war were German ambitions considered a threat to their empire. In secret discussions with Vansittart, Churchill and British diplomats, Weizsäcker falsely claimed the opposite, that Ribbentrop was advising the Führer that London was too spineless to seriously oppose the Reich.[3]

During the Sudetenland crisis in the summer of 1938, the resistance attempted to persuade the British to reject Hitler's proposed territorial revisions. Its envoy, Kleist-Schmenzin, was a patrician landowner and monarchist. He enjoyed a certain reverence among peers for his fight to reduce the wages of Pomerania's farmers during the 1920s. He once maintained, "The nobility must adhere to the sovereign manner developed over centuries, the feeling of being master, the uncompromising feeling of superiority."[4]

On August 19, Kleist-Schmenzin told Churchill that in the event of war, German generals were prepared to assist in a revolt to establish a new government in Berlin "within 48 hours." The envoy also supplied the British Secret Service with classified information regarding the Reich's defense capabilities. Just as Goerdeler had previously described German rearmament as a "colossal bluff" in London the year before, Kleist-

Schmenzin told the English that the German army was unprepared for war. The British agent Jan Colvin wrote later that every single sentence Kleist uttered would suffice on its own to earn him a death sentence for treason.[5]

The back gate of Number 10 Downing Street swung open on the evening of September 7, 1938, to admit Erich Kordt with a private letter from Weizsäcker for Halifax. The German baron wrote of how “the leaders of the army are ready to resort to armed force against Hitler’s policy. A diplomatic defeat would represent a very serious setback for Hitler in Germany, and in fact precipitate the end of the National Socialist regime."[6] Thanks to his lofty position in the Reich’s Foreign Office, Weizsäcker knew that the Führer’s determination to recover the Sudetenland was no bluff. By encouraging London toward a showdown, he hoped to provoke an armed confrontation.

Chamberlain however, received more accurate reports from his ambassador in Berlin. Henderson had already written Undersecretary Cadogan in July that although Hitler did not want war, the Germans were preparing for every eventuality. The astute Henderson also lanced Weizsäcker’s mendacious claim that Ribbentrop was advising the Führer that the British have no backbone: “Certainly Ribbentrop did not give me the impression that he thought we were averse of war. Quite the contrary: he seems to think we were seeking it."[7]

Chamberlain prudently concluded the Munich accord with Hitler on September 30, peacefully transferring the Sudetenland to Germany. The resistance movement considered this a “crushing defeat” for its machinations.[8] Disappointed, Kordt declared that “the best solution would have been war."[9] Undaunted, its members exploited covert diplomatic channels to flood London with more bogus news about Germany. Goerdeler told the English on October 18 how supposedly Ribbentrop was boasting that Chamberlain “signed the death sentence of the British Empire” in Munich: “Hitler will now pursue a relentless path to destroy the empire."[10]

As the Polish crisis charged the diplomatic atmosphere in the summer of 1939, the resistance again poured oil on the fire. After meeting with

Danzig's Commissioner Burckhardt in June, the British diplomat Roger Makins stated in a Foreign Office memo, "Great Britain should continue to show an absolutely firm front. This is the course advocated by Baron von Weizsäcker and by most well-disposed Germans." Assistant Undersecretary Sargent summarized, "Weizsäcker is constant in his advice that the only thing which makes Hitler see reason is the maintenance of a firm front and no premature offer to negotiate under pressure." Weizsäcker, the number-two man in German foreign affairs, contributed to the inflexibility of the other side.[11]

The resistance continued to supply Chamberlain with descriptions alleging the desperate economic situation in Germany, Hitler's unpopularity and the army's readiness to mutiny. The better-informed British emissaries in Berlin maintained a sober perspective. Henderson's subordinate, Ogilvie-Forbes, wrote Halifax about the conspirators on July 4, 1939: "I have a deep-rooted mistrust of their advice and their information. They are quite powerless to get rid of the Nazi leaders by their own efforts and they place all their hopes for this purpose in war with England and the defeat of Germany. One can have little respect for or confidence in Germans for whom the destruction of a regime is a higher aim than the success in war of their own country."[12]

Despite such warnings, Henderson saw with dismay how his government based some policy decisions on intelligence provided by the resistance movement. To be sure, Chamberlain was aware of the risk posed by war. An all-out conflict with Germany would compel England to seek American aid, increasing U.S. influence abroad. Waging war against the Reich was therefore contingent on an immediate collapse of enemy resistance. Told by conspirators in August 1939 that German generals anxiously await London's declaration of war so that they can topple the government, and that Hitler is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Britain's prime minister reacted.[13] The director of the Central European Section of the British Secret Service, Sigismund Best, recalled, "At the outbreak of the war our Intelligence Service had reliable information that Hitler faced the opposition of many men who occupied the highest functions in his armed forces and his public offices. According to our information, this opposition movement had assumed such proportions as to be able to lead to a revolt and overthrow the Nazis."[14]

French Foreign Minister Bonnet wrote in his memoirs, “We expected an easy and rapid victory. The declaration of war by England and France on Germany of September 3 was supposed to clear the way for the military coup so sincerely promised to us."[15] General Gamelin told Benoist-Mechin, “I don't anticipate having to deal with the German army. Hitler will be ousted the day we declare war!"[16] Right after the war’s start, Chamberlain noted in his diary, “What I hope for is not a military victory – I doubt very much that this is possible – but a collapse of the German home front."[17] Ribbentrop himself wrote in 1946, “We didn't know then that London was counting on the conspiratorial group of prominent military men and politicians, and therefore came to hope for an easy victory over Germany. The circle of conspirators in this way played a decisive role in the outbreak of the war. They thwarted all of our efforts to reach a peaceful solution . . . and very likely tipped the scales for the English decision to declare war."[18]



Baron von Weizsäcker stands behind the chairs seating Hitler and Italian Foreign Minister Ciano during the ceremony ratifying the Three Power Pact in September 1940.

The Early Campaigns

Germany’s campaigns in World War II are a popular subject for study by historians and military analysts; however, when researching Hitler’s strategies, successes and failures, few take into account the pernicious

influence of the resistance movement. Just as turncoats in the diplomatic service helped block an understanding with England in 1939, high-ranking members of the army consistently disrupted the war effort once hostilities opened. Though less than five percent of German army officers identified with those betraying their country,[19] the unfaithful few often occupied positions in planning and logistics, enabling them to cause havoc disproportionate to their number. The Gestapo eventually maintained a watch list but generally did not investigate the army. This allowed subversion of combat operations to continue virtually undetected. The Prussian aristocrat Fabian von Schlabrendorff, a staff officer and remorseless saboteur, expressed the spirit of the plotters: “Preventing Hitler’s success under any circumstances and through whatever means necessary, even at the cost of a crushing defeat of the German realm, was our most urgent task."[20]

Appointments to key posts in the general staff gained the conspirators insight into military strategy as it was formulated, information they communicated to the enemy. The former army chief of staff, Haider, testified in 1955, “Almost all German attacks, immediately after being planned by the OKW, became known to the enemy before they even landed on my desk."[21] The German armed forces lacked the element of surprise from the first day of the fighting. On August 30, 1939, two days before Germany invaded Poland, Kleist-Schmenzin delivered the detailed operational orders to the British embassy in Berlin with instructions to “pass this on to Warsaw."[22] Chamberlain duly forwarded the document to Colonel Beck.

A few months after the Polish campaign, a member of the Reich’s Foreign Office in Berlin who was smuggling microfilm was arrested by the SD. The film contained precise information about the strength and locations of the German occupational forces in Poland. The former SD chief wrote later, “In the OKW they were more than a little surprised at such an accurate and comprehensive report, especially as the statistics were correct to the smallest detail.” He speculated that “only senior German officers” could have provided the material.[23]

Among the loosely-affiliated subversive groups, military intelligence, the *Abwehr*, was especially destructive. Its chief, Canaris, was a master of

disinformation. In his memoirs, Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz stated that the *Abwehr* "delivered not a single useful report about the enemy throughout the entire war."[24] Canaris recruited the equestrian monarchist Hans Oster to run the Central Department of the agency. A general staff officer during World War I, Oster had left the army in 1932 for violating its code of honor. Canaris reinstated him as an ersatz lieutenant colonel in 1935. When war broke out anew, Oster began drawing acquaintances hostile to the state into the *Abwehr* as "specialists." From October 1939 on, Oster furnished copies of every agency report, plus whatever could be obtained from the OKW, to the Dutch military attaché in Berlin, Colonel Giysbertus Sas. He urged Sas to use the information to reinforce Holland's defenses against Germany and to relay the reports to the Western powers. On April 3, 1940, Oster provided him the details of the imminent German invasion of Norway in order for him to forewarn Oslo.[25]

One month later, Oster gave Sas the target date of the German surprise offensive in the West.[26] The Dutch disbelieved the information. Similarly instructed, Belgian Ambassador Adrien Nieuwenhuys opined skeptically, "No German would do something like that!"[27] Believing to have tipped the Allies off in time, Oster calculated that the abortive offensive would cost the German army 40,000 dead. In his own words, he still considered himself "a better German than all those who run after Hitler."[28] German telephone security personnel monitoring the Dutch embassy line knew that Sas had received classified intelligence about the western campaign, but were unable to localize the source. To divert suspicion, Oster tried to frame Baroness Steengracht, the wife of a German diplomat. Only Ribbentrop's intervention prevented Oster, the son of a pastor, from using the *Abwehr's* resources to implicate an innocent woman for treason.[29]

Canaris not only protected Oster, but betrayed military secrets on his own. The fact that he had served as a U-boat captain during World War I did not prevent Canaris from providing the British Secret Service with details of German submarine development during the 1930's. Senior *Abwehr* officers profited from the war, accepting bribes in exchange for draft deferments, and the police arrested Hans von Dohnanyi, a "specialist" recruited by Oster, for public graft. *Abwehr* directors in Munich sold paintings, tapestries and currencies on the black market. Canaris himself arranged for his agency courier plane to regularly fly in

fresh strawberries for himself from Spain.[30] *Abwehr* corruption and incompetence became so rife that Hitler eventually relieved the crafty admiral of his post and placed the agency under Himmler.

The house-cleaning, however, was far off in 1940, when Canaris struck another serious blow to the German cause. After London rejected Hitler's generous peace offer that July, the Führer contemplated how to continue the war against England. Considering an amphibious invasion of the British Isles too risky, he decided to attack the enemy's overseas possessions. Capture of the British base at Gibraltar, controlling the nautical lifeline to Egypt and the Suez Canal, was an option. Not only would the conquest virtually cripple England's position in the Mediterranean, but the operation was within Germany's resources. Prerequisite was Spain entering the war on the German side, and Madrid already favored Germany and Italy. In July 1940 the Spanish head of state, Francisco Franco, publicly stated, "Control of Gibraltar and expansion into Africa is both the duty and the calling of Spain."[31] On the 19th, he announced his willingness to declare war on Britain, adding, "In this case, some support by Germany would be necessary for the attack on Gibraltar." [32] Hitler could transfer troops to southern Spain to stage the expedition against the strategic English base. Berlin sent Canaris to negotiate the alliance because of his good relations with prominent Spaniards. In collusion with Weizsäcker, however, he accomplished the opposite by privately informing Franco that Germany's position was desperate, with almost no hope of winning the war. He advised his host to keep Spain neutral, reassuring him that Hitler would not send troops into Spain to force Madrid's cooperation. Had Canaris persuaded Franco to support the Reich, "It's more than possible that such a decision by Spain at this moment would have meant the end of the war," wrote Spanish Foreign Minister Serrano Sũner.[33] With Germany's position thus strengthened, Hitler would have possessed a more formidable hand when dealing with Molotov that November. He may have been able to resolve his differences with the USSR without resorting to arms.

Betrayal in the East

Germany possessed a superb intelligence-gathering network for the war

in the East. Her specialists had already cracked the complex Soviet radio encryption and monitored its traffic. Since 1934, code breakers at the Hillersleben installation had been tapped into secure telephone lines connecting Moscow to its European embassies. In 1937, the Germans began deciphering Soviet photo-telegraphic communications. In addition to reading diplomatic correspondence, they gained knowledge of Russian armaments production, the location and capacity of the factories and shortfalls in industry.[34]

Theodor Rowehl's Long Range Reconnaissance Squadron, subordinate to the Luftwaffe Supreme Command, flew high-altitude missions over the USSR beginning in 1935. Air crews photographed Soviet naval installations, armaments and industrial complexes, military fortifications and troop concentrations. Thousands of pictures of the Russian interior provided ample images to produce accurate maps. In 1947, the USA used Rowehl's photographs to prepare its own maps of the Soviet Union.[35]

During the first weeks of the Russian campaign, advancing German troops captured many official documents which Soviet administrators had failed to destroy or evacuate. The cache offered a comprehensive picture of the USSR's infrastructure, analyses of civilian attitudes and so forth. Luftwaffe communications specialists deciphered Soviet military radio traffic, promptly and consistently delivering details about Russian troop strength, status of available ammunition and fuel, planned aerial and ground attacks and the marching routes of enemy divisions. The post-war American Seabourne Report concluded that German code breakers maintained 80 percent accuracy in their knowledge of all planned Soviet military operations and armaments production.[36]

Monitoring stations forwarded this vast quantity of intelligence to the *Abwehr* for assessment. Canaris, Oster and fellow conspirators relayed almost none of the findings to Hitler. They instead stored the cache of documents in Angerburg, East Prussia, never evaluated.[37] Military cartographers prepared maps of the East without referencing Rowehl's pictures. Some they based on Russian maps that had been printed in 1865. The German army received inaccurate ones depicting dirt roads, which became impassable quagmires after rainfall, as modern, paved highways. This misinformation often confounded the tactical advance of German

mechanized forces. They occasionally approached towns that were not even shown on the maps.

Shortly before the Russian campaign began, members of the German military mission in Rumania had already learned from locals and from Red Army deserters of formidable new Soviet armor sighted during Stalin's occupation of Bessarabia. Witnesses provided details about the Russian KV-I and KV-II heavy tanks plus sketches of a third model that was faster, well-armored and boasting equally good firepower. Georg Pemler, a reconnaissance flight officer, pored over aerial photographs taken by Rowehl's squadron above the Pruth and Dnestr River areas. He discovered images depicting the mystery tank on railroad flatcars, en route to Red Army units stationed near the Reich's frontier. Called by Pemler to examine the pictures, Rumanian Colonel Krescu told him, "Until now, we thought that this tank is still in development and being tested. That manufacture has progressed so far that the troops are already receiving deliveries, is a discovery of great importance.... The supreme command must be informed of this at once!"[38]

Gathering the photographs and relevant data, Pemler personally flew to Berlin to disclose his findings. Intelligence officers accepted his report but did not forward it to the OKW. When the new Soviet tank, the T-34, appeared in battle in June 1941, it shocked German frontline troops. Its innovative sloping armor was too thick for German tank guns to penetrate, and it rendered German anti-tank ordnance obsolete.

While German intelligence concealed Soviet armaments capability from OKW planners, Canaris assured Hitler that only one single-track railroad joined the Russian source of raw materials in the Urals to industrial centers in Moscow.[39] An *Abwehr* liaison in Rumania, Dr. Barth, told his associate Pemler, "The leadership of the armed forces is grossly underestimating the strength of the Red Army. I personally can't avoid the impression that this is *even promoted by* certain men. We have confirmed confidential information, for example, that in one particular tank factory around 25 heavy tanks are produced daily. Since then we've identified three such plants.... The chief of the general staff scribbles a question mark here, sending the report back for re-evaluation without informing the Führer."[40]

Barth was referring to Haider, who had become chief of staff in September 1938. A post-war "de-Nazification" panel judged Haider's earlier conduct a "complete betrayal of his country."[41] After the conquest of Poland in 1939, he formed a secret planning staff to overthrow the government and placed General Heinrich von Stuipnagel in charge, who one German historian described with admiration as an "old-school European nobleman."[42]

Haider urged Hitler to invade Russia, downplaying the hazards of the campaign. On February 3, 1941, Hitler directed Foreign Armies East, a branch of military intelligence, to assess the Red Army's ability to deploy large formations in the expansive Pripyat marshland. This consisted of swampy terrain in the south-central sector of the future front. Receiving the finished report on the 12th, Haider made an alteration before forwarding it to the Führer. He deleted the assessment's conclusion that it would be possible for the Russians to shift troops within the marsh, thus posing a threat to the flank and rear of advancing German divisions. Based on this evaluation, the OKH did not allot formations to guard the southern periphery of the wetlands to screen the planned thrust of the German *6th* Army and 1st Panzer Army toward Kiev.

Soon after hostilities broke out, the Soviet 5th Army, transferred south via Pripyat's railroad network, assaulted the open left flank of the German *6th* Army. This compelled Hitler to halt the advance on July 10. "The capture of Kiev by the beginning of July 1941, barely three weeks into the campaign, would have been entirely possible but was prevented by strong Soviet forces operating from out of the Pripyat marshlands," concluded the military historian Ewald Klapdor.[43] Unable to continue the advance without infantry support from the *6th* Army, the 1st Panzer Army became deadlocked in costly battles of attrition against frontally attacking Russian divisions for another seven weeks. Two months into the campaign, Hitler remarked that the entire operation would have been planned differently, had he known the enemy's actual disposition and strength.



A Soviet BT-7 (right) and two T-34 tanks abandoned by their crews. German intelligence officers became aware of the existence of superior Soviet armor before the Russian campaign, but did not inform Hitler. The Red Army began receiving deliveries of the T-34 in May 1941.

Once the invasion began, the Soviets received timely reports on German military operations from the Supreme Command of the Army, the OKH, right from Hitler's headquarters. The communications chief there, General Erich Fellgiebel, secretly installed a direct telephone line to Switzerland to transmit classified information. Stationed in Bern was Hans Gisevius, another of Canaris' s *Abwehr* "specialists." He relayed the reports to Moscow. Other agents in Switzerland such as Rudolf Rössler participated, identified but tolerated by Swiss intelligence. The sophisticated espionage network was nicknamed the Red Orchestra by the SD. Schellenberg wrote later that the information it leaked "could only have come from the highest German sources."[44] When the SD finally shut down the spy ring in 1942, it arrested 146 suspected operatives in Berlin alone. The courts condemned 86 of them to death for treason. They had transmitted over 500 detailed reports to the Kremlin. In October 1942, the Gestapo arrested 70 more Communist operatives in the Reich's Air Ministry and in the Bureau for Aerial Armaments.

On June 22, 1941, the Red Army possessed 25,508 tanks, 18,700 combat aircraft, and 5,774,000 soldiers.[45] There were 79,100 cannons distributed

among the 303 divisions deployed in the first and second waves. Hitler took on this force with crucial information withheld, his intelligence agencies consciously understating enemy resources, and officers forewarning the enemy of German attacks. On August 1, five weeks into the campaign, the Red Army deployed 269 divisions, 46 of them armored, and 18 brigades against the invaders. An intelligence report the Führer received two weeks earlier had fixed Russian strength at just 50 rifle divisions and eight tank divisions.[46] On August 10, German soldiers overran the command post of the Soviet 16th Army east of Smolensk. The field police discovered copies of two OKH plans for the German attack. They found another German operational plan upon capturing Bryansk soon after, which the OKH had presented to Hitler on August 18.[47] Gisevius later boasted, "We had our spies all over the war ministry, in the police, in the ministry of the interior, and especially in the foreign office. All threads connected to Oster."[48]

Advance knowledge of German plans helped the Red Army embroil the invaders in heavy fighting around Smolensk in July and August. The Germans regained the initiative when Hitler decided on August 21 to shift his panzer divisions southward toward Kiev. "The senseless operation now decided upon," fumed Haider in his diary, will "scatter our forces and stall the advance on Moscow."[49] The Germans in fact destroyed four Soviet armies and mauled a fifth around Kiev, an immense battle of encirclement, capturing much of the Ukraine. Hitler told his architect Giesler, "I saw in these flanking thrusts and envelopments the only chance of beating the Russian mass-formations.... I had to literally wrest operations away from my generals.... Not even this success persuaded my generals of the only possible strategy in Russia."[50]

Weary of wrangling, the Führer ultimately endorsed Haider's brainchild; a frontal attack against Moscow. Operation *Typhoon* began on October 1, but deception and sabotage determined the outcome. Quartermaster General Wagner reported the stockpile of provisions for the attack to be "satisfactory." Against the minimum requirement of 24 supply trains per day for Army Group Center, however, between eight and 15 reached the front daily during August, twelve in September. Even during fair weather, hundreds of fully-laden freight trains sat idle in switch yards between Berlin and Krakow.



Halder and Hitler during 1937 army maneuvers. Early in 1941, Halder described the Red Army as "too primitive" to conduct offensive operations. In September 1942, the Führer relieved him of duty as army chief of staff.

Largely responsible for the delay in supplies were the director of Main Rail Transport South, Erwin Landenberger in Kiev, and the director of Main Rail Transport Center, Karl Hahn in Minsk. Hitler ordered both men arrested for sabotage. Released from Sachsenhausen concentration camp months later, Hahn described himself to another officer as a "mortal enemy of the Nazis." Hitler personally selected their replacements. Erhard Milch and Albert Speer assumed responsibility for getting the trains rolling again. The situation improved within weeks. Speer prioritized locomotive manufacture, while Milch reorganized rail and canal transportation to the front. Milch warned subordinates, "I have permission to hang any railroad official from any tree, including senior managers, and I'll do it!"[51]



Albert Speer (right) became armaments minister in February 1942. He put an end to the general staff's influence over arms production and procurement and assigned private industry to reorganize and prioritize weapons manufacture. This significantly increased output. Here he commends an army sergeant for introducing a suggestion, based on personal combat experience, which led to modification of a weapons system. Soliciting input from "rankers" was another revolutionary departure from the old order.

The OKH gradually reduced Army Group Center's striking power during *Typhoon*. On October 11, it transferred away the 8th Army Corps with three divisions and the 1st Cavalry Division. The 5th , 8th and 15th Infantry Divisions soon followed. The *9th* Army Corps with four divisions went into "reserve." On November 3, the OKH announced the intention to withdraw seven panzer divisions from the eastern front for replenishment.[52] At the same time, the Luftwaffe sent nearly a fourth of its personnel in Russia on leave. The high command transferred out 13 fighter groups, leaving just three groups of Fighter Squadron 51 left to support the offensive from the air.[53]

Typhoon made progress nonetheless. Northwest of Moscow, the 1st

Panzer Division took Kalinin. Instead of wheeling southeast to invest the capital, the troops advanced northward. Eyewitness Carl Wagener recalled, “The capture of Kalinin opened a great tactical opportunity for us. We now held the cornerstone of Moscow’s defense system and could push toward the poorly-secured northern flank of the city. The place was ours for the taking, with good roads and less than a day’s travel time. Instead, our panzers and the *9th* Infantry Army supporting us received the order to attack the completely insignificant town of Torzhok, more than 100 miles north of Kalinin. We felt that the new directive from the OKH didn't make any sense."[54]

The worst handicap confronting German combatants was the dearth of cold-weather gear. The Reich’s industry had manufactured enough quilted winter uniforms to equip at least 56 divisions. Also, prefabricated shelters and barracks heaters had been loaded into 255 freight trains awaiting rail transport east. On November 1, Hitler inspected winter apparel earmarked for the Russian front, and Quartermaster Wagner assured him that the gear was already en route to the field armies in sufficient quantity.[55] Nine days later, Wagner confided to Haider that most quilted uniforms would not go forward until the end of January. They remained loaded on trains in Warsaw for months.[56] Hitler did not learn of the shortages until December 20, when General Heinz Guderian flew in from the central front and told him. Luftwaffe personnel all received cold-weather apparel, only thanks to Milch’s personal supervision.

The OKH was no less remiss about advising Hitler of intelligence reports predicting a planned Soviet counteroffensive. During November, the Russians transferred most of their Siberian rifle divisions from the Far East to the Moscow sector. German aerial reconnaissance monitored the augmenting concentration of enemy reserves. Long-range observation planes reported an alarming increase in the number of Soviet transport trains conveying fresh formations to the Kalinin-Moscow sector. The OKH disregarded the information. Sweden supplied the Germans with accurate statistics of the planning and scope of the approaching Red Army offensive, but the *Abwehr* group receiving this intelligence did not forward it to Berlin.[57]



German artillerymen enjoy a hot meal during a lull in the fighting in Russia. They wear standard-issue army field uniforms, affording insufficient insulation during the 1941/42 winter.

In mid-November, Foreign Armies East assessed that Soviet divisions are 50 percent understrength, with more than half the officers and men untrained. In fact however, many of the 88 rifle divisions, 15 cavalry divisions and 24 armored brigades about to attack the German lines were well-equipped and at full roster.[58] On the evening of December 4, 1941, only hours before the onslaught began, Foreign Armies East concluded that the combat effectiveness of the Red Army is insufficient for “the Russian to be capable of a major offensive at this time, unless he introduces significant reinforcements."[59]

At the end of its strength, caught by surprise, the ill-clad German army gave ground that winter. Hitler was exasperated over the failure to realize his strategic concept in the face of opposition from the general staff. He cited “the total underestimation of the enemy, the false reports of enemy reserves and of the strength of his armaments... and incomprehensible treason” as contributing to the German army’s first major defeat of the

war.[60]

Despite the retreat before Moscow, the Germans maintained favorable positions for a 1942 summer campaign. Hitler fixed the main thrust toward the Caucasus mountain range, the oil fields and refineries of which supplied 80 percent of the USSR's petroleum. He ordered Army Group South correspondingly reinforced. With the capture of Voronezh on July 8, 1942, the German panzer divisions were poised to cross the Don River, but the Führer initially forbade the crossing. Not wanting to weaken the offensive by splitting his forces, he commanded instead that the 4th Panzer Army turn south to join the main advance toward the oil fields.[61] Soviet formations in the south were in retreat and seriously demoralized.

German radio specialists arrested two former Polish army officers in a Warsaw suburb, who transmitted detailed information to Moscow about the Caucasus offensive. *Abwehr* officials, the rank-and-file of whom did not share the treasonous sentiments of Canaris and Oster, reported this to the Führer's headquarters. It revealed that Stalin knew about the Germans' military preparations. Receiving the report, General Fellgiebel decided that it was "too alarming" and would only upset the Führer. He buried the news.[62]

With the element of surprise compromised, Army Group South began Operation *Blue* on July 28. Army Group A pushed toward the Caucasus. To the northeast, Army Group B consecutively advanced on Stalingrad to cover the flank. This was an industrial complex strung along the Volga River, notorious for the working population's primitive housing. Hitler's operational plan called for the destruction of Stalingrad's arms production through bombardment or siege. Capture of the metropolis was not an expressed goal; the Caucasus was the primary objective of the campaign.[63]

The high command soon watered down the offensive. Haider wrote in his diary on June 30 that the chief of the OKW staff, Alfred Jodl, had told Hitler during a situation conference "with great emphasis, that the fate of the Caucasus will be decided at Stalingrad. Therefore, necessary to transfer elements of Army Group A to B.... In new packaging, an idea is served up that I had introduced to the Führer six days earlier."[64]

Halder shifted the 4th Panzer Army from the southern front on July 30, to serve as the "spearhead for the attack on Stalingrad." Despite protests from Army Group A's field commanders, Halder also took away the elite *Grossdeutschland motorized* infantry division. One historian summarized, "Now two equally strong army groups with almost the same number of panzer and motorized formations were operating in two different directions. The northern group attacked with four panzer and three motorized divisions; the southern with three panzer and three motorized divisions. The formations slotted for the main purpose of the campaign were weaker than those covering the flank."[65] Army Group South proved unable to conquer the Caucasus region, which would have paralyzed the Red Army's capacity to conduct offensive operations. The northern force became bogged down in a costly and pointless effort to capture Stalingrad.



Grenadiers atop a Panzer IV operating east of the Don River in Russia. The German high command split Army Group South's powerful mechanized forces during the 1942 campaign season.

During the advance toward the Caucasus, the OKH robbed Army Group A of another trump: the 60,000-man Italian Alpine Corps. This consisted of three well-trained mountain divisions, each of them equipped with 5,000 pack mules. Instead of deploying the elite corps in the mountains, the OKH directed it to march northward to reinforce Stalingrad. Thus the soldiers, clad in wool uniforms for wear in the cooler, high-altitude climate, began a punishing foot march in warm weather across the Asian steppe. As mountain divisions, they possessed no anti-tank guns or heavy artillery, making them virtually defenseless against Soviet armor.

On August 27, General Rinaldo Dallarmi wrote Mussolini about the corps'

orders: “We came to Russia certain to go to the Caucasus, superbly suited for our training, weapons and equipment, and where we could join the best German and Rumanian mountain divisions in an almost sport-like competition to achieve the most. Then we're re-directed into the Don region, into flat territory and without adequate weapons. We received rifles from 1891 and four ridiculously small cannons, useless against the Russian 34-ton tanks. There are only so many *Alpini*. That’s not a human resource that should be treated frivolously."[66]

The southern offensive foundered when a major Soviet counterattack struck Army Group B in November. This compelled Army Group A to retreat from the Caucasus to avoid becoming flanked. The Russians surrounded and destroyed the German 6th Army at Stalingrad. Historians blame Hitler for the catastrophe, but the verdict does not weigh the flagrant disregard of his orders, misleading intelligence he received, or militarily senseless troop movements carried out by the OKH without his knowledge.

For instance, the left flank of Army Group B ran southeastward along the Don River, from Voronezh to Stalingrad. Defending the positions were the Hungarian 2nd Army, the Italian 8th Army, the Rumanian 3rd Army and the German 6th Army. The 4th Panzer Army covered the right flank. Hitler knew that the poorly equipped foreign contingents could not repulse a potential Soviet offensive. In August, he ordered the 22nd Panzer and two infantry divisions transferred to support the Italian 8th Army. The Hungarians were also to receive reinforcements, including heavy artillery and new German 75mm anti-tank guns. Halder virtually ignored the order, dispatching only weak, token units a few weeks later.[67]

In late October, the Führer directed that the crack 6th Panzer Division and two more infantry divisions be shifted from France to buttress the Rumanians and the Italians. The OKH delayed the full transfer of these formations until December. It was equally tardy about stationing new Luftwaffe field divisions behind the armies of Germany’s allies, as Hitler had called for. The 22nd Panzer Division, which he thought was at full strength, sorely needed replenishment. Of its 104 panzers, just 32 were operational. The OKH concealed this fact from its commander-in-chief.[68]

On September 9 and 16, the war diary of the OKW staff recorded

Hitler's orders to reinforce the Italian 8th Army. The diary noted on October 6, "The Führer repeats his anxiety over a major Russian attack, perhaps even a winter offensive in the sector of our allies' armies, driving across the Don toward Rostov. The reasons for apprehension include strong enemy troop movements and bridge-building over the Don in many places." Once more the OKW diary, from November 5: "The feared Russian attack over the Don is again discussed. The number of bridges under construction there is constantly growing. The Luftwaffe wants to show pictures. The Führer orders strong air attacks against the bridge sites and suspects enemy assembly areas in the woods along the banks."[69]

Reconnaissance confirmed Hitler's concerns. From the comparatively high ground they defended southwest of Sirotinskaya, men of the 44th *Hoch und Deutschmeister* Infantry Division observed concentrations of Soviet troops and materiel along the Don, opposite positions of the Rumanian 3rd Army. In a nearby sector, Russian deserters told Italian interrogators that they had been ordered to remain in concealment during the day. The *Abwehr* liaison to whom the Italians relayed this intelligence, replied that German aerial observation was more credible and had reported nothing, when in fact, the opposite was true. Max Ladoga, a radioman with the long-range reconnaissance squadron, wrote, "The Russians there are constantly bringing up strong reinforcements. Our daily flights have captured it all, filmed and reported it." The observer Pemler recalled that flight crews sent timely warnings up the chain of command, which no one took seriously.[70]

Other sources delivered details of Red Army preparations. *The Abwehr* had launched Operation *Zeppelin* in July 1942, during which hundreds of anti-Communist Russians parachuted behind Soviet lines and provided information to the Germans. Over the next several months, they counted 3,269 railroad trains ferrying Soviet troops toward the Stalingrad combat zone, plus another 1,056 trains carrying war materiel. German aerial reconnaissance discovered on November 10 that the Russians had transferred the 5th Tank Army there as well.[71] On November 11, the commander of *Nachrichtenaufklärung 1* (Communications Evaluation Section 1) submitted to the OKH a comprehensive analysis of intercepted Soviet military radio traffic. It identified enemy reserves transferred to the Stalingrad area of operations. The report accurately predicted that

that Russians were about to launch a pincer attack to surround the German *6th* Army: "The deployment may already be substantially progressing."[72]

Foreign Armies East was responsible for assessing these reports. In the spring of 1942, Halder had arranged for his former adjutant, Reinhard Gehlen, to become its chief. Believing like Hindenburg that "Germany should not be governed by a Bohemian corporal," Gehlen later acknowledged actively supporting the resistance.[73] In August 1942, he reported with a straight face that since the previous February, due to a shortage of officers, the Red Army had not formed a single new combat division.[74]

Gehlen disclosed to Hitler neither the progress *of Zeppelin* nor the proximity of the 5th Tank Army, which he claimed was stationed far to the north. Even though the Red Army had massed 66 percent of its armor opposite Army Group B, Gehlen warned that the Russians were planning instead to attack near Smolensk farther north. He reassured the Führer's headquarters on November 11, "There is no indication of a possible attack soon.... Available (Soviet) forces are too weak for major operations."[75]

The Russian offensive began on November 19, 1942. Tanks steamrollered the Rumanian positions as Hitler had feared. In a major pincer operation, they drove southward to surround Stalingrad. The Soviet 57th Army plunged headlong into General Hans-Georg Leyser's full-strength, motorized 29th Infantry Division, which counterattacked without authorization from the general staff. Its 55 tanks of Panzer Battalion 129 struck furiously along a railroad line detraining masses of surprised Russian infantrymen and supplies. Sealing off this enemy penetration, the 29th turned southwest to assault the flank of the Soviet 4th Corps. Before the operation began, the division received the suspicious order to break contact and withdraw into the Stalingrad perimeter.[76] This enabled the Russians to continue their encirclement of the 6th Army.



A self-propelled *Sturmgeschutz* III assault gun, consisting of a 75mm cannon mounted on the chassis of a Panzer III, passes Soviet prisoners in Stalingrad during the siege in late summer 1942. (Bundesarchiv)

Believing that the Luftwaffe could airlift sufficient supplies into Stalingrad, but also based on Gehlen's report that the Soviets had no reserves left, Hitler decided to supply the trapped garrison by air until a relief operation could be prepared. Junkers transport planes and Heinkel bombers delivered provisions to the *6th* Army's airfields and evacuated wounded on return flights out. Organizing the missions was quartermaster Colonel Eberhard Finckh. An active conspirator, he arranged for a substantial number of flights to carry useless cargo. In addition to food, medical supplies and ammunition, the beleaguered troops at Stalingrad received thousands of old newspapers, candy, false collars, barbed wire, roofing paper, four tons of margarine and pepper, 200,000 pocketbooks, shoe laces, spices and so on.[77]

The German army launched a relief expedition on December 13, spearheaded by General Erhard Raus's *6th* Panzer Division. Ten percent

above full strength, the formation possessed 160 tanks, including Panzer IVs fitted with the new high velocity cannon, 4,200 trucks, 20 heavy armored cars and 42 self-propelled assault guns. The 17th and 23rd Panzer Divisions (which had been weakened by constant fighting that autumn) took part in the operation. The attack progressed to within 30 miles of Stalingrad. Some 50 miles west, Soviet tanks counterattacked and captured the airfield at Morosovskaya, threatening the German flank on the lower Chir River. Instead of dispatching weaker covering units to plug the gap, the high command transferred the 6th Panzer Division to the Chir position. This, in the opinion of the historian and former Waffen SS Lieutenant Heinz Schmolke, was pure overkill: "Two weeks later, I myself was commander of a strongpoint on the Donez River, which was completely frozen over, with two bridges. I held the position there for ten days and nights against a vastly superior Russian force. No one can tell me that the Chir front could not have held out one more day, until contact with the surrounded *6th* Army was established."[78]

When on December 23 the *6th* Panzer Division received the incomprehensible order to withdraw from the relief operation, its officers at first assumed it to be a mistake. Deprived of this armored spearhead, the remaining units proved too weak to press the attack toward Stalingrad. Shortly before his death in the 1950's, Raus expressed the torment his conscience still suffered for not disobeying the order and continuing the advance. There were 220,000 German soldiers and foreign auxiliaries on the *6th* Army's roster in mid-January 1943, two weeks before the garrison surrendered.[79] Six thousand survived Soviet captivity.

The battle of Stalingrad not only proved a crushing military defeat for Germany but, for her civilian population, became the psychological turning point of the war. In 1948, former Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller summarized the dissonance in the Führer's headquarters: "Many older officers of high rank sabotaged Hitler's plans.... Although I'm no military expert, I know that Hitler was right about military matters more often than these people. Hitler would issue an order, and because some general would find Hitler personally offensive, this officer would indirectly disobey the order. Then when a disaster occurred, the same man and his friends dumped the blame on Hitler. And they often lied right to his face."[80]

Believing Army Group South to be substantially weakened, the Soviets exploited their victory by opening an immediate offensive. The Germans rallied and inflicted a serious and surprising defeat on the Red Army at Kharkov in March 1943, stabilizing the German front. During late spring, the OKW began concentrating its best divisions for a new offensive with limited objectives. Two mechanized army groups were deployed around Belgorod and Orel to launch a pincer movement to destroy a Soviet concentration near Kursk. Hitler confided to General Guderian that the proposed Operation *Citadel* made him "sick to his stomach," though some of his best military strategists supported this unimaginative plan.[81] The OKW hoped to restore Germany's prestige in the eyes of her allies, as well as morale in the armed forces, with a major victory. It also anticipated netting several hundred thousand prisoners who could be integrated into Germany's industrial workforce. *Citadel* began on July 5, 1943. Passages quoted from the memoirs of German infantrymen in the first wave suggest that subversives in the OKH had betrayed this operation as well. Kurt Pfötsch, a grenadier in the *Leibstandarte*, wrote this: "The first day of the attack with a huge commitment of panzers, artillery and elite divisions, dive bomber attacks and rocket launchers, such as never before seen in warfare, and we're stuck here lying flat till Ivan shoots us to pieces. I realize with a shudder, there's no element of surprise! . . . It looks instead as though he knew how and where the German attack would take place."[82]



Panzer IV crews await the order to advance against Russian positions during *Citadel*. Soviet sources greatly exaggerated the number of German tanks lost in the battle.

Herbert Brunnegger, serving in the SS *Totenkopf* division, recalled that the day before the offensive, “Two deserters, waving a white flag, come over to us from the Pirol woods. . . . The deserters tell us what we still don't know; the scope and exact timetable of our offensive!” During the battle, Brunnegger continued, “I learn from one of our artillery officers that this operation was already postponed twice because the attack schedule had been betrayed."[83] Hitler called off the slow-moving, costly advance in less than two weeks.

The fighting at Orel-Belgorod coincided with Anglo-American landings in Italy. This compelled the OKW to transfer troops to the Mediterranean theater, so the Red Army went over to the offensive. It never relinquished the strategic initiative for the balance of the war. Traitors on the general staff continued to work for their country’s defeat. General Rudolf Schmundt said this of the plotters: “They stick together through thick and thin, sabotage the Führer’s orders whenever they can, naturally in such a way that the evidence never points to them. They're always scattering sand in the machinery of our armed forces. Each one watches the other’s back. Officers who don't belong to their clique they try to banish to some insignificant post."[84]

In the summer of 1944, law enforcement authorities cracked the resistance movement and began trying the ringleaders for treason. One of the defendants, the former social democrat Wilhelm Leuschner, testified about a conversation he had once had with Ludwig Beck. A general staff officer during World War I, Beck had become chief of staff in 1935. He had retired from active service before the second war, but the former general still intrigued against Hitler. His fellow plotters considered him the military head of the anti-government movement. Leuschner's recollection of Beck's words, quoted here, offer disturbing insight into the designs of these so-called Germans: "Beck explained that there are now enough people we can depend on in positions of command on the eastern front, that the war can be controlled until the regime collapses. They arrange, for example, retreats of their units without ever informing neighboring formations, so that the Soviets can penetrate the gap and roll up the front on both sides. These neighboring units are therefore also forced to retreat or are captured."[85]

The following illustrates what it meant to be captured by the Red Army, as Leuschner so indifferently described. In June 1944, the Soviets began a major offensive against Army Group Center. The Germans had shifted reinforcements too far south, to the sector where Gehlen had falsely warned that an enemy operation would take place. Foreign Armies East apparently took no notice of the 138 Soviet divisions and 5,200 tanks (in all 2.5 million Russian soldiers), massed opposite Army Group Center.[86] The army group's first general staff officer, a tenanted aristocrat named Henning von Tresckow, had gradually filled the entire staff with anti-Hitler officers.[87]

The Russian attack, Army Group Center's report for the first day stated, was "a complete surprise, since according to the current evaluation of the enemy, no one presumed such massing of enemy forces."[88] In the path of the Soviet juggernaut was the fully operational German 4th Army. Much according to Beck's recipe for defeat, it received no orders; nor was it informed of the plight of neighboring formations. In the words of historian Rolf Hinze, it suffered from an "inexplicable lack of direction" from the headquarters of Army Group Center. Tresckow made no effort to reestablish communications or to airlift supplies. His staff dispatched not one observation plane to reconnoiter the progress of advancing enemy

mechanized forces, which would have been necessary for determining a retreat route for the 4th Army.[89] The Germans lost a total of 350,000 men during the Soviet offensive, of which 150,000 became prisoners of war. Roughly half of these men soon died from shootings along the march to collection areas, starvation or neglect during the torturous rail journey, jammed into freight cars, toward the Russian interior. The Soviets paraded 57,600 survivors through Moscow. The mob lining the street cursed, threatened and spat at the helpless prisoners. This was the fate that Tresckow, Gehlen, Beck and company visited upon their countrymen who wore the same uniform.



Officers of the Waffen SS led by example, here fighting in the front line during combat operations in the Belgorod sector.

Normandy

Throughout the struggle against the USSR, the German soldier fought in the Mediterranean theater as well. First engaged in Libya and in the Balkans, he eventually defended Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy against slowly advancing Allied forces. He also guarded Europe's Atlantic coast in preparation for the Anglo-Americans' long-heralded invasion. Until the Allied troops that were massing in England crossed to Normandy on June 6, 1944, the German garrison in France experienced comparative

tranquility. Pre-invasion France was a suitable environment for subversive staff officers to reinforce their position without distraction. They transferred abettors to the corps and divisional headquarters where the armed forces were most vulnerable, and contrived to coordinate their sabotage with the Western Allies.

The resistance liaison agent was Count Helmuth von Moltke, a wealthy landowner hoping "to exterminate the National Socialist ideology."[90] He maintained contact with Goerdeler, Halder and Beck, and told an English acquaintance in 1942 that he and his friends consider a "military defeat and occupation of Germany absolutely necessary for moral and political reasons."[91] Canaris sent Moltke to Istanbul the following year to establish contact with the Americans. There he met with two professors affiliated with the U.S. intelligence agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

After the interview, the pair submitted a report to OSS chief Bill Donovan, describing "the readiness of a powerful German group to prearrange and support military operations of the Allies against Nazi Germany." The OSS drafted the "Hermann Plan," based on negotiations with Moltke, which it forwarded to the Allies' combined chiefs of staff. It stated that the German group is prepared "to develop as far-reaching a military plan of cooperation as possible with the Allies . . . so that rapid, decisive success on a wide front is secured."[92] Moltke's accomplices offered to fly a general staff officer to England "to arrange with the western Allies the opening of the German west front" in case of a planned invasion.[93]

U.S. records on the progress of the negotiations remain classified to this day. Washington withholds the names of German contact persons and agents who never came to light through arrest by the Gestapo, post-war admission in personal memoirs and interviews or by accident. In October 1945, representatives of the U.S. military government in Germany and the War Department convened to discuss "views on documents which should be destroyed, or to which the Germans were to be denied all future access." The conference chairman, Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Gronich, recommended, "Serious consideration must be given to plans for the organized destruction of papers which possess no value for the Allies, and . . . which must not be permitted to fall into German hands after the

departure of the occupational forces."[94]

Among the inaccessible records are those pertaining to U.S. collusion with German subversives before and during the Normandy invasion. The reader must decide whether incidents cited below, in which German command centers issued orders which were militarily incomprehensible given the tactical situation, are the product of pre-arranged sabotage or examples of gross misjudgment by well-trained and thoroughly experienced professional staff officers.

Prior to the beginning of Operation *Overlord*, the Allies' code name for the invasion, the Germans possessed a communications, espionage and reconnaissance network capable of discerning the enemy's plans well in advance; technicians in the German Postal Investigation Office had even tapped into the Atlantic cable. In early 1944, they monitored a conversation between Churchill and Roosevelt about the approaching landings.[95] At the same time, a specially-trained SD agent parachuted into England from a captured B-17 bomber. He had been reared in the United States, so the German-born operative could convincingly pose as a British officer of engineers. Arriving in Portsmouth, he visited unit after unit inquiring about how he could improve the troops' equipment. He supplied Berlin with detailed messages regarding invasion preparations using a radio transmitting a virtually untraceable signal.

In April 1944, the U.S. 4th Division conducted a mock landing, Operation *Tiger*, at Slapton Sands, to simulate the planned attack on Utah beach along the Normandy coast. The German operative sent his superiors advanced warning of the exercise, where a large number of ships and troops would be concentrated in broad daylight. He even transmitted the precise location of the building where U.S. Generals Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley intended to observe the maneuver. Though the 9th Air Fleet of the Luftwaffe had enough bombers available to launch a surprise raid on the Allied ships as the SD agent recommended, it neglected the opportunity.[96] On the second day of the exercise, German speed boats attacked on their own initiative, torpedoing four large landing ships, causing the death of hundreds of Allied troops.

The question of whether the Allies would land at Calais, where the English Channel is most narrow, or further south at Normandy, supposedly

tormented German intelligence. In February 1944, an Arado 240 twin-engine observation plane joined the 3rd Test Formation, an air force reconnaissance unit. Thanks to its exceptionally high speed, the Arado began safely flying two to three missions daily over English ports. Curiously, the Luftwaffe staff abruptly transferred it to Reconnaissance Squadron F100 on the eastern front in March, depriving the Atlantic defenses of this valuable spotter.[97]

Though incapable of the Arado's performance, Messerschmidt 410 and Bf 109 combat aircraft were able to patrol the English coast during variable weather, descending from a high altitude to gain speed. The pilots identified hundreds of landing vessels assembled at Southampton and Portsmouth on April 25. They discovered no similar concentration in the English harbors of Dover and Folkestone, which were opposite Calais.



Battery *Lindemann* along the Atlantic Wall. The Germans constructed massive concrete shelters to protect coastal artillery from damage by Allied aerial and naval bombardment.

German signals personnel monitoring enemy radio traffic between Plymouth and Portsmouth established beyond any doubt that these ports were the staging zones for an invasion army. Nevertheless, the general staff took no corresponding measures, such as transferring more troops to Normandy or laying nautical mines.[98] The Germans also employed a

captured American Thunderbolt fighter to photograph the enemy ship build-up that spring. Shortly before D-Day, the Allied landings on June 6, however, the OKW suspended all reconnaissance flights over England without explanation.

At Tourcoing, headquarters of the German 15th Army, Lieutenant Colonel Helmut Meyer operated a sophisticated radio monitoring station. Its 30 specialists were each fluent in three languages. They intercepted English radio traffic on June 1, 2, 3, and 5 announcing the invasion. This discovery Meyer sent up the chain of command, but no one alarmed the front-line units.[99]“

In May 1942, Hitler had ordered the systematic construction of fortifications along the Western European coastline. In addition to large artillery emplacements reinforced by thick concrete walls, his plan called for a myriad of smaller steel and concrete structures. These included shallow, one-man wells to conceal machine gunners, bunkers for anti-tank or anti-aircraft guns, protected storage for munitions and shelters for personnel. The building of this Atlantic Wall, defending the beaches of Calais, Normandy and Brittany, consumed immense quantitites of cement and iron, and employed thousands of artisans and laborers. In May 1943 alone, 260,000 men were at work on the project.[100]

Defending the coast was Army Group B, consisting of the German 7*th* and 15th Armies. The commander of the army group, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, believed that the invasion should be repulsed right on the beaches. Were the invaders to penetrate inland, the German army would succumb to their quantitative superiority and control of the skies.

The basic plan was that once the enemy landed, the coastal artillery and front-line infantry divisions would keep him pinned down until German armored formations could counterattack. The Allies intended to land 20,000 men in the first wave, and have 107,000 ashore by the second night of the invasion. The German 7*th* Army, which would bear the brunt at Normandy, was 128,358 men strong. Many were veterans of earlier campaigns, occupying numerous fortified, well-concealed positions constructed of solid building materials.

The 91st Airborne Division, comprising another 10,555 men,

supplemented this force. The OKW subordinated the 4,500-man Parachute Rifle Regiment 6 to the 91st. This was a superbly trained and resolutely led formation especially suitable for combating Allied paratroopers.[101] Supporting the 7*th* Army were three armored divisions comprising 56,150 men, and the Germans had three more Panzer divisions in western France. By all estimates, the defenders, even considering Allied air power, had sufficient forces on hand to repel the invasion. In fact, the American chief of staff, General Walter Bedell Smith, estimated that there was a 50 percent chance the Allies would be unable to hold the Normandy beachhead.[102]

During the final weeks before D-Day, German staff officers neglected opportunities to strengthen the Atlantic Wall and arranged troop and supply movements that substantially weakened its defensive capabilities. One German surveillance unit infiltrated French resistance cells with 35 of its operatives. They furnished Colonel Oskar Reile, the unit's commander, with a list of lines of communications, power stations, rail and traffic junctions, and fuel depots the French planned to sabotage once the invasion was under way. They also revealed the locations of where partisans intended to ambush German troops en route to the combat zone.[103]

Reile delivered a comprehensive, written report to General Heinrich Stuipnagel, the military commander in France. The report included the prearranged sentences the BBC would broadcast to alert the French resistance that the invasion fleet is at sea. Stuipnagel, however, was secretly attempting to win the cooperation of this Communist-oriented terrorist organization for the coup against Hitler.[104] He took no action on Reile's information.

Rommel implored the OKW to release several million French-made teller mines in storage since the 1940 campaign. He wished to incorporate them into the network of wire obstacles along the beaches. After months of stalling, the OKW delivered them a couple of days before the invasion, too late to emplace. The Germans' own coastal mines, equipped with both magnetic and pressure detonators and difficult to disarm, had been in production since 1943. Some 2,000 of these powerful explosive devices had been stowed in an underground airplane hangar at Le Mans, but

instead of using them to mine coastal waters, supply personnel received orders to transfer the mines to Magdeburg, Germany, as a "precaution against sabotage."[105]



In August 1942, an outnumbered German garrison held the French port of Dieppe against a 6,000-man Allied landing force. The Germans repulsed the surprise raid within hours, killing or capturing over 3,600 Canadian, English and American troops and shooting down over 100 British planes. It was an ominous prelude to D-Day.

On May 15, 1944, the German high command transferred the second group of Fighter Squadron 26 from Normandy to Mont-de-Marsan in southern France. Only days before the invasion, it also relocated elements of Fighter Squadron 2 to airfields around Paris. The Luftwaffe still possessed 183 FW190 daylight fighters in camouflaged bases near the coast, but on June 4, 26th squadron commander Joseph Priller received orders to fly another 124 fighters to Mont de Marsan in southern France, far from Normandy. Ground personnel and ordnance would travel there by truck, hence temporarily neutralizing the squadron's combat effectiveness.

Priller telephoned General Werner Junck, chief of the 2nd Fighter Corps and protested, "This is just pure insanity! If we're expecting an invasion, the squadrons have to be here, not gone away somewhere. And what

happens if the attack takes place right during the move? . . . Are you all nuts?” Junck brusquely replied that his irate subordinate cannot judge “important developments of state” from the perspective of a squadron commander.[106] On the morning of June 6, Colonel Priller and his wing man, Sergeant Heinz Wodarczyk, strafed the first wave of the Allied landing forces. Two FW190s were all that the Luftwaffe could scramble after years to prepare a defense.

Frequent Anglo-American bombing raids on German cities forced the Luftwaffe to deploy fighter squadrons to defend the Reich’s air space. Weeks before the invasion, an operations staff prepared additional airfields in western France to rapidly transfer the planes to combat Allied landing forces. The plan called for temporarily shifting 600 fighters. Transport personnel then received orders to collect a portion of the fuel, munitions, and spare parts stockpiled at the provisional French airbases and move them back into Germany. As a result, only 200 planes could relocate to these runways, followed by another 100 on June 20.[107]

The plan initially envisioned the further transfer of most of Germany’s night fighters. Their experienced pilots could have taken a deadly toll of the slow-flying Douglas transport planes (ferrying Allied airborne troops to drop zones) and the British four-engine Lancaster bombers (towing gliders) hours before the amphibious landings began. Instead, the Luftwaffe operations staff ordered the night fighters to assemble in air space well east of the coast, far from the drop zones. Post-war historians explain that Allied radio interference and ruses, including aircraft dropping strips of tinfoil to confound German radar, confused the enemy during the crucial phase. This, however, is a dubious explanation for the fighters' misdirection on the night of June 5/6: Well before D-Day, the experienced German officers who directed nocturnal missions had been sucessfully guiding their aircraft to intercept RAF bombers despite ongoing, similiar British efforts to disrupt them.

In April and May, Luftwaffe bombers flew nighttime missions against Portsmouth and Plymouth. A raid by 101 medium bombers on the night of April 30 caused considerable damage to Plymouth’s harbor installations, but on May 30, with the invasion armada congested and taking on troops and supplies, the Luftwaffe discontinued the missions.[108]

The Germans concentrated a substantial amount of artillery on the Atlantic Wall, whose crews conducted frequent firing exercises. Many batteries rested in massive concrete bunkers that could withstand repeated hits from naval or aerial bombardment. Observation posts and range finders were in reinforced emplacements to direct the fire. However, ten days before D-Day, orders came to move over half the artillery ammunition into storage in St. Lo, and the crews of the observation bunkers received instructions to dismount all range finders for immediate shipment to Paris for inspection.[109] On June 6, German coastal gunners had to fire on Allied warships by sighting down the barrel. Once the invasion began, the gun crews received deliveries of ammunition from the St. Lo arsenal. Projectiles were often of the wrong caliber. One 88mm battery was issued a load of special rounds for spiking the barrels. [110]

One of the worst disadvantages for the defenders was the absence of senior officers the morning of June 6. The day before, the commander of the 7*th* Army, General Friedrich Dollmann, had ordered all divisional, regimental, and artillery chiefs to Rennes to take part in war games. He also personally postponed an alarm exercise for his army scheduled for the night of June 5/6. Had the drill run its course, the troops would have been on full alert when the invaders came.[111] Other commanders were on inspection tours, hunting, or visiting Paris nightclubs.

Even Rommel was away. His chief of staff, General Hans Speidel, was an active conspirator, and had encouraged Rommel to return to Germany for a family birthday party. Among the few generals to remain at his post was Dietrich Kraiss, who kept his 352nd Infantry Division on alert on his own initiative. Defending “bloody Omaha” beach, his men inflicted serious losses on the first waves of U.S. troops.

The trump card of the German defense scenario was armor. During 1943, the Waffen SS established two new tank divisions, the 9*th* *Hohenstaufen* and 10th *Frundsberg*. Formed into the 2nd SS Panzer Corps under Paul Hausser, their mission was to help repulse an invasion in the west, and their training emphasized countermeasures against airborne and nautical landings with enemy air superiority. In March 1944, despite Hitler’s misgivings, the OKW transferred the corps to the southern Ukraine to rescue General Valentin Hube’s surrounded 1st Panzer Army. Hausser’s

divisions accomplished the task, but the supreme command kept them in the Ukraine as an army reserve. The OKW shifted the corps from sector to sector, performing no useful purpose and disrupting training.

Corporal Franz Widmann recalled, “Then comes the report from the western front on June 6 that the Allies have landed in Normandy. We, the *Hohenstaufen* and *Frundsberg*, who had drilled and prepared for this landing for months, sat around in Russia doing nothing and waited for the Russians to attack."[112] Finally on June 12, Hausser received orders to return with his corps to France. The fatiguing rail journey across Europe ended over 150 miles from the invasion front. Since the June nights were short, much of the road march west took place in daylight. This not only exposed the vehicles to attacks by enemy fighter-bombers but the inordinate driving distance reduced engine life of the tracked vehicles by half.[113]

The army’s most formidable formation was the *Panzer-Lehrdivision*. Its 229 fully operational tanks included upgraded Panzer IV’s and high-performance Panthers. The division had 658 armored half-tracks serving as personnel carriers or mounting anti-aircraft guns, rocket launchers, flame throwers, and cannons. The OKW stationed this mechanized monolith nearly 100 miles from the Normandy coast. On June 4, the high command ordered the division to load its Panther tanks onto a freight train for transfer to Russia. They were en route east when the invasion began. “Taking away the Panther battalion robbed the division of its strongest attack force,” wrote its last commanding officer after the war.[114] The U.S. Army later calculated that it averaged a loss of five Sherman tanks to neutralize a single Panther in combat.[115]



German Panther tanks loaded on railroad flatcars for transfer to a new sector. The Panther was fast, well-armored and boasted superior firepower.

Shortly before 10:00 pm on the evening of June 5, 1944, naval personnel manning the German radar station at Paimbeouf near St. Nazaire discovered a large concentration of ships making south from England. Radio operator Gerhard Junger recalled, “It was clear to every one of us that the long awaited invasion had begun.” The radar stations at Le Havre and Cherbourg also monitored the Allied armada, reporting its movement to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief West, Gerd von Rundstedt, in Paris. They further intercepted American meteorological predictions transmitted to U.S. bomber squadrons, which normally did not fly nocturnal missions. At 3:09 am on June 6, the navy reported “hundreds of ships course south” to the Supreme Command West.[116] The Luftwaffe signals company on the isle of Guernsey off the Normandy coast identified 180 Lancaster bombers towing gliders toward the mainland at 10:40pm. The commander of a German army regiment on the island was duly notified, and relayed the information to an adjutant at his corps headquarters in St. Lo.

Having hosted guests that evening at Army Group B headquarters in La Roche-Guyon, Speidel received word from General Erich Marcks' army corps of Allied airborne landings in five different areas, another report from the Navy Group West of paratroopers dropping in sectors defended by

the German 716th and 711th Infantry Divisions, confirmation from Major Förster about the situation developing near the 711th and a Luftwaffe report that 50-60 transport machines were ferrying in enemy paratroops.[117] Speidel did not alarm his divisions. When Rundstedt's staff telephoned Speidel for clarification, he replied that "the reports are considered exaggerations." Army Group B headquarters wrote them off as "possibly confused with flight crews bailing out." [118] The commander of the 716th Infantry Division, General Wilhelm Richter, wrote that there was no alert until Allied paratroopers were already in action. The chief of staff of OB West, Günther Blumentritt, justified not sounding the alarm to avoid "unnecessarily disturbing the troops, who...need time to sleep." [119]

Once the landings were under way, Rundstedt formally requested immediate release of the three armored divisions in Normandy from the OKW reserve for deployment at the front. From Hitler's headquarters General Alfred Jodl refused, explaining, "according to the reports I've received, this attack can only be a feint. ... I don't think now is the time to release the OKW reserves."[120] In Rommel's absence, Speidel had persuaded the Führer's headquarters by telephone that until the situation becomes "clarified," the OKW has to "keep its nerve and wait."[121] Rundstedt's chief of operations, Colonel Bodo Zimmermann, telephoned the OKW to protest the senseless delay. The OKW's Baron Horst von Buttlar-Brandenfels, another general conspiring against the government, shouted in reply, "You have no right without our prior permission to alarm the armored troops. You are to halt the panzers at once!" [122]

The OKW posted the weakest of the three reserve armored divisions, the 21st, closest to the coast. Despite the urgings of its commanding officer to authorize an attack against British paratroopers who had landed nearby, Speidel denied permission at 4:30am to commit the division's panzer regiment. The formation remained concealed in a wooded area for hours. Finally released by the 7th Army to attack the drop zone, Panzer Regiment 22 began rolling at 8:00am. Speidel soon directed it to about-face and advance toward the coast, keeping the troops on the road and out of action for much of the day.[123] The 21st suffered repeated aerial attacks and lost 50 tanks on the march. It ultimately attacked on direct orders from Rommel, who had just returned to Normandy. Speidel had

briefed his commander-in-chief on the situation in a telephone conversation at 10:15 am. The marshal's arrival late that evening put an end to his chief of staff s dilatory tactics. Speidel had however, effectively sabotaged the timely deployment of three armored divisions. During mid-day on June 6, he also refused requests by General Max Pemsel to reinforce the hard-pressed 716th Infantry Division, defending the east bank of the Orne River, with elements of a neighboring formation. The division was practically wiped out by nightfall.[124]



A coastal battery with camouflage netting. During the Normandy invasion, four battleships bombarded a similar gun position at Houlgate. The battery sustained over 1,000 hits, some from 15-inch diameter projectiles and from aerial bombs, without serious damage.

The 12th SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* was alerted by its commanding officer at 2:30am and by the OB West at 4:00. On his own initiative, Speidel sent the division in the wrong direction. In position near Lisieux, it received his instructions to transfer 30 miles further from the coast. "The order had a shocking effect" on the troops, wrote its first general staff officer, Hubert Meyer, after the war.[125] A new directive arrived for the division to about-face and advance toward Caan late in the afternoon. "That meant a change of direction, more time lost and for our strung-out

armored unit, one more day's march under rotten conditions," recalled the Panther crewman Georg Jestadt. "We had the impression that the whole movement of our army's components was like an anthill someone had struck with a stick." Jestadt reflected on the corresponding influence on morale: "Disappointment, even anger spread among the men. Almost every soldier saw that something here just isn't right."[126] Heinz Schmolke, a company commander in the division's Panzer Grenadier Regiment 26, wrote later, "The troops and frontline officers of all ranks knew back then that the enemy had to be driven back into the sea in his moment of weakness; that is during the first hours after the landings.... My regiment only went into action on the third day of the invasion, although we could have engaged the enemy within the first three hours."[127]

The modus operandi of various army staffers was to keep the troops on the roads as long as possible, often exposing the men to strikes by Allied aircraft. As columns of the *Panzer-Lehrdivision* approached Caan, according to a surviving officer, "they were discovered by enemy aerial reconnaissance and a short time later attacked with machine guns, rockets, and bombs. . . . Soon black pillars of smoke from the burning vehicles revealed the route for fresh waves of fighter-bombers. Even today, many years later, recalling this march causes nightmares for everyone who participated."[128] The division lost ten percent of its strength before reaching the combat zone. Despite the protests of its commanding officer, Fritz Bayerlein, Dollmann had ordered the *Panzer-Lehrdivision* to advance on Caan at 5:00pm, in broad daylight, after having withheld its marching orders for nine hours.

Simultaneously travelling to the coast was the non-motorized 277th Infantry Division. General Dollmann, aware of the good progress it was making by rail from southern France, ordered it to detrain in Angers and proceed on foot; a 14-day march to Normandy. The 277th's commanding officer, General Albert Praun, drove ahead to Dollmann's headquarters in Le Mans to have the order rescinded. There Praun observed the staff's female telephone operators dressed in swimsuits, sunbathing in hammocks and on the roof of the bunker.[129] In a meticulously researched post-war study of the German defense at Normandy, Ewald Klapdor, a former Waffen SS captain who had participated in the fighting, concluded that Army Group B displayed "no particular hurry in shifting divisions to the

combat zone." [130]

On D-Day, Rommel ordered the transfer to Normandy of the fully-motorized 3 Flak Corps, quartered south of Amiens, but the corps commander, General Wolfgang Pickert, only learned of the invasion well into the afternoon. He first had to drive to Paris to get confirmation. His batteries, which were also effective against armor, did not reach the front until June 8 and 9.[131] Even arriving late, the corps shot down 462 aircraft and destroyed over 100 Allied tanks.

One staff officer who played a primary role in thwarting German countermeasures at Normandy was Colonel Alexis Freiherr von Roenne. As chief of Foreign Armies West and a protégé of Gehlen, he sought to deceive Hitler, Rommel, and Rundstedt through bogus reports that the Normandy operation was a feint intended to divert German formations from Calais, further to the north where the real invasion was supposedly about to take place. General Eisenhower had hoped to mislead the defenders through operation *Fortitude*, consisting of false reports about a fictitious "First U.S. Army Group" waiting in reserve in England to launch an invasion at Calais. Roenne came by this information as the Allies had intended. He forwarded it to the OKW, but not before drastically inflating the number of American divisions beyond that which U.S. intelligence had fabricated on June 2. Receiving Roenne's analysis, Speidel's staff actually increased the tally further.[132] The assessments regarding the Allies' disposition and plans that Roenne supplied to Army Group B were too consistently inaccurate to have been unintentional.[133]

Evidence of surveillance refuting Roenne's mendacious predictions never reached the Führer. At dawn on June 6, Lieutenant Adalbert Bärwolf flew a Messerschmidt Bf 109 model G8 observation plane over the Allied invasion fleet. The photographs he took of the enormous armada off the Normandy coast should have dispelled any doubt that this was the only landing force. The general staff of Army Group B took no action, nor did it forward the images up the chain of command.[134]

Speidel used the specter of a landing at Calais to prevent the transfer to Normandy of combat-ready reserves from the German 15th Army, in position on the northern flank of the 7th. This formation was one-and-a-

half times the size of the 7th Army and included the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions. The latter was among the best-equipped in the German armed forces. More importantly, the 15th Army had 30 times the transport capacity available to Dollmann's divisions at Normandy, even though it had shorter supply lines and was not in action. Speidel repeatedly refused to transfer any of these vehicles to support combat operations, explaining to dismayed field commanders on June 22, for example, that "according to all reports at hand, an attack against the channel front on both sides of the Somme (at Calais) is still expected." [135] Speidel ordered the 116th Panzer Division transferred toward Dieppe, *away* from the fighting, on June 6. One "report at hand" that Speidel forgot to mention was the capture on the afternoon of June 7 of Allied operational plans for the U.S. Army's 5th and 6th Corps and for the British 30th Corps. Supporting a counterattack by the engineer battalion of the German 352nd Infantry Division and Grenadier Regiment 916, Cossacks of the 493rd East Battalion discovered the documents among the bodies of U.S. naval officers in an abandoned landing craft. Over 100 pages long, the cache revealed that the Normandy operation would be the *only* invasion. Lieutenant Colonel Fritz Ziegelmann of the 352nd delivered the find to his superiors. The headquarters of the 7th Army did not act on this valuable intelligence coup.

Staff officers transplanted from the eastern front caused terrible consequences for the German defense at Normandy. In May 1944, General Wagner, remiss in shipping cold weather gear to the troops in 1941, attempted to transfer the entire stockpile of artillery rounds for the 352nd and 716th Infantry Divisions to an army ammunition depot far behind the lines. This was supposedly to increase the amount of munitions in reserve. Only the intervention of General Marcks prevented Wagner from carrying out this suspicious directive, which would have practically crippled the two divisions on D-Day.[136]

Wagner appointed Colonel Finckh, who had previously mismanaged supply deliveries to Stalingrad, to quartermaster for Rommel's army in June 1944. Almost immediately, deliveries to the front of fuel and munitions slowed down drastically. The German method of employing French waterways at night to convey materiel remained successful and

undetected by the Allies until Finckh interfered. Under his direction, just one tenth of the artillery's allotted ammunition was coming forward, despite sufficient stores in the depots.[137] The troops were receiving only one fifth of the required quantity of other supplies. On July 2, General Alfred Gause reported from Caan that only three to five rounds per gun were available to German batteries per day.[138] Rommel assigned General Friedrich Dihm to investigate the bottleneck. Dihm advised Rommel of Finckh's derilection of duty. The field marshal wanted Finckh court-martialed.



The wreckage of a German column on a Normandy road, strafed by Allied fighter-bombers during the 1944 invasion of France. (Bundesarchiv)

Among the supplies that never reached the front, subsequently falling into U.S. hands, were 500,000 gallons of aviation fuel and 175,000 day's rations for the troops, including 2.5 million cigarettes. What German soldiers *did* receive was often useless. At Carentan for example, transport planes airdropped provisions to Parachute Rifle Regiment 6. The German paratroopers, low on small arms ammunition, found some containers filled with condoms.[139]

Hitler believed that treason played a decisive role in the success of the Allied landings. Regarding the German defense of Cherbourg, Rochus Misch of the Führer's staff recalled, "Pictures reached us from Sweden showing a German colonel in command of a bunker installation defending

the invasion coast, toasting two English officers with champagne. Naturally without having fired a single shot.... Nothing, absolutely nothing worked right on the German side during the invasion. There was but one explanation; betrayal and sabotage."[140]

In his memoirs, Corporal Otto Henning of the *Panzer-Lehrdivision* attributes the fall of Cherbourg to “unknown individuals in the Führer’s headquarters,” who stalled the transfer of fully equipped reserves to Normandy while the 7*th* Army bled. The eyewitness Henning’s verdict: “One can't avoid the impression that here, the most varied orders were intentionally twisted, while other, equally important orders were simply never forwarded."[141] Gestapo chief Müller, perhaps the best informed man in Germany with respect to sabotage, said after the war, “A great measure of the German military’s wretched performance in France after the invasion was the result of attempts by the conspirators and their friends to surrender to the Western powers or to let the Americans and the English pass right through our front lines, so that they would reach Germany before the Russians did."[142]

German headquarters staffers failed to alarm front-line units, air crews, and naval forces in a timely manner. They delayed counterattacks, issued frequently conflicting orders, and commanded anti-aircraft batteries to hold their fire during the Allied aerial bombardment of the Le Havre naval base. They transferred combat-ready formations away from the enemy, and plotted against their own government. Speidel, who in Rommel’s initial absence directed Army Group B during the critical first stage of the invasion, spent much of the morning of June 6 playing table tennis with fellow staff officers.[143]

It is inconceivable that the German army in France, major component of an experienced combat force accustomed to fighting at unfavorable odds, could function in such chaotic fashion after months of preparation and rehearsal for a crucial battle. In January 1944 by comparison, withdrawing German troops in Italy occupied the Gustav Line south of Rome. Their engineers had begun fortifying it the previous October. Despite being outnumbered in some sectors by Allied forces ten to one, with virtually no armor or air support, the German defenders held their position for four months. At Cassino, the key position on the Gustav Line, a New Zealand

division spent four days trying to neutralize a single German panzer concealed in the ruins, suffering nearly 300 men killed.[144] The Germans at Normandy possessed hundreds of panzers and stronger, more systematically prepared defenses, yet forfeited the initiative on the first day of combat.

The "Good Germans"

So surreptitious was the German resistance movement, its ruinous influence may never have come to light but for a single incident. A bungled attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, prompted an ongoing state investigation. This exposed the conspiracy to sabotage the German war effort. It led to the death by firing squad, suicide, or execution after trial of 160 plotters. The would-be assassin was Count Claus von Stauffenberg, chief of staff of the Reserve Army since July 1, 1944. There were approximately half a million soldiers, trained and fully equipped, awaiting transfer to the front. In charge of the Reserve Army was General Friedrich Fromm. To weaken the field formations, he contrived ways to delay the deployment of the ersatz troops under his administration. During the first month of fighting in Normandy for example, the Germans suffered 96,000 men killed, wounded or captured. Under Fromm's direction, the western army received just 6,000 replacements and 17 new tanks.[145] In July, battalions stationed in Holland for the purpose of replacing losses to infantry divisions fighting in Normandy were transferred to southern France instead.[146]

Stauffenberg represented Fromm at the Führer's headquarters in Rastenburg during situation conferences. His job was to report on the progress of replenishing the combat divisions with reserve personnel. Stauffenberg understood his mission as the fabrication of plausible excuses for why only a fraction of the troops languishing in homeland garrisons were moving forward. An officer on Goebbels's staff summarized the deceptive explanations Stauffenberg offered Hitler: "The air raids are responsible, he says. Then only the gas masks are lacking, next the NCOs still have some mandatory course, or a particular type of ammunition isn't available, or rather can't be delivered because of the destroyed transportation network, an arsenal suffered a direct hit where the rifle bolts for a whole regiment were stored. . . . Always at the last minute

something gets in the way."[147] Stauffenberg once told fellow plotters that their “allies” were Germany’s “military crises and defeats."[148]

Stauffenberg concealed in his brief case a time bomb, weapon of choice for terrorists worldwide, and smuggled it into the July 20 conference at Rastenburg. He prudently left the session before the explosion and boarded a courier plane for Berlin. The blast superficially injured Hitler but mortally wounded a stenographer and three officers. Several others among the 24 participants suffered injuries. Among those to die was Rudolf Schmundt; he had recently used his personal influence with the Führer to promote Stauffenberg’s lackluster career.[149] Another victim was the staff officer Colonel Heinz Brandt, an opponent of National Socialism whom no one had forewarned of the day’s agenda.[150]

At the OKW offices on Bendler Street in Berlin, accomplices awaited news of Hitler’s demise to launch *Wälkure*, the coup to overthrow the National Socialist government. There among others were the pensioned General Ludwig Beck, ex-general Erich Hoepner, who had been dishonorably discharged from the army in 1942 for insubordination and cowardice, the retired Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, and General Friedrich Olbricht, who was Fromm’s subordinate (Based on the examination of captured German records, the U.S. State Department later established that Olbricht had leaked military secrets to the Red Orchestra via Gisevius).[151] When Stauffenberg arrived, he told his colleagues that the commander-in-chief did not survive the bombing. The plotters therefore therefore set the revolt in motion. Back at Rastenburg, General Fellgiebel, who was privy to the planned assassination, did not contact the Berlin conspirators to warn them of its failure. Instead, he was among the first to congratulate Hitler on his narrow escape from death. Fellgiebel was able to briefly block communications between Rastenburg and the outside world, but could not indefinitely disrupt telephone service. Hitler reached Goebbels in the capital. He also spoke on the line with Major Ernst Remer, commander of the Berlin Watch Regiment. He ordered Remer to arrest the conspirators.

One reason for the coup’s rapid collapse was the lack of cooperation the usurpers received from the army. Signals personnel on the Bendler block monitored the Führer’s telephone conversation. Aware of the

circumstances, they did not transmit teletype orders formulated by the plotters to military units. Colonel Fritz Jäger, a member of Stauffenberg's circle, visited several barracks to muster a company of riflemen to seize the radio station, the propaganda ministry, and to arrest Goebbels. He could not find a single soldier willing to carry out his orders.[152]

Stuipnagel and a handful of like-minded aristocrats supported the coup from their Paris headquarters. They managed to mobilize a battalion of German Security Regiment No. 1 to arrest members of the SD and the Gestapo, including the SS police chief in Paris, Carl Oberg, in their office. Stulpnagel's associates persuaded the battalion's troops that the SD had rebelled against Hitler; only through this fiction did they gain the men's cooperation. In Berlin, one of the teletype orders Witzleben drafted for the army falsely blamed "an unscrupulous clique of party leaders who are nowhere near the front" for the mutiny he himself helped instigate.[153] According to an analysis by a contemporary German historian, "The plotters did not risk openly confessing that the coup was directed against Hitler, but argued instead to be acting supposedly in the name of the dead Führer against an 'unscrupulous clique.' They were themselves not certain in their own cause. They feared that most of the armed forces and the German people stood behind Hitler in their hearts and would therefore not obey them."[154]



Accompanied by Himmler, Göring and General Hermann Fegelein, Hitler holds his injured arm after the assassination attempt at Rastenberg on July 20. Keitel speculated on whether German artisans might have secretly planted the time bomb during construction of the headquarters complex. Hitler interupted, "No German worker would raise a hand against me. This is the work of some degenerate aristocrat."

Military members of the resistance movement had no connection with the rank-and-file of the armed forces. "They have nothing within them in common with the German soldier," charged the *Völkischer Beobachter* on July 22.[155] Stauffenberg, for example, had never held a combat command. His army driver, Karl Schweizer, testified later that the count had maintained a generous supply of wine, champagne, schnapps, liqueurs and tobacco at both his Berlin residence and his duty office in the war ministry. Lieutenant Colonel Fritz von der Lancken had regularly procured these luxury items, unavailable to the front-line soldier or to the German public in the fifth year of war, for his fellow conspirator. Schweizer stated that he could scarcely remember a day when Stauffenberg did not consume alcohol.[156] The count had also arranged for frequent deliveries to his address of smoked eel, oil sardines and other delicacies through administrative contacts with North Sea fisheries.[157]

The chief of the SD, Dr. Ernst Kaltenbrunner, prepared a series of confidential reports for the Reich's Chancery analyzing the motives of the

plotters. After the war, the former resistance member Friedrich Georgi judged the reports to be “absolutely sober and factual, if not of course one-sided."[158]

Regarding Stauffenberg, Kaltenbrunner concluded in his September 23, 1944 report that the count and his circle of aristocrats “pursued not only political objectives but social ones, namely to reinstate and maintain the privileged position of a select, socially-connected group of persons."[159]

Major Remer wrote of July 20, “The presumed death of Adolf Hitler left all the officers and also the troops in a state of shock. Never in my life, even after the collapse (in 1945), have I witnessed such profound sorrow."[160] In his post-war autobiography, Günther Adam, a veteran of the SS *Hohenstaufen* division which was deployed in France that July, included his own recollection: “That evening, after a day of combat, some young army officers come to us in our command post and tell us that there was an attempt on the life of the Führer that had failed. They said that senior army commanders had been involved. They ask in complete sincerity if they can join us, since they are too ashamed now to be officers of the army."[161]

In the opinion of Rolf Hinze, a veteran of the 19th Panzer Division, the assassination attempt came “at the most unfavorable time imaginable, at a time when unified, firm leadership was essential. The troops felt this way regardless of their diverse ideological viewpoints, even among those who inwardly rejected Hitler. Everywhere we heard the expression, ’stab in the back', and were relieved that the Führer’s central authority remained intact."[162] The Führer’s adjutant, Colonel Nicolaus von Below, stated, “In as much as the senior generals had lost that unswerving confidence in Hitler, in the same measure the ordinary soldier trusted in his leadership. I have no doubt that only this fact held the front together."[163]

Right after the assassination attempt, signals personnel at Rastenburg discovered Fellgiebel’s secret telephone line to Switzerland that had served to communicate military intelligence to Soviet agents. The Gestapo questioned staff officers, some of whom were already on the watch list, making arrests when suspicion of subversive activity surfaced. Colonel

Below told the Führer of word received from his cousin: Since the round-up began, his army corps on the eastern front was finally receiving supplies at consistent and timely intervals.[164]

Discovery of the sabotage "totally depressed" Hitler, Goebbels told an associate.[165] The Führer's personal security officer, Hans Rattenhuber, said this to Giesler: "The betrayal of the fighting front hit him harder than the attempt on his life. He just repeated to us that he has long reckoned with being shot at by someone in this reactionary clique. But something this underhanded he never would have expected from an officer, certainly not this shabby betrayal of the soldier who risks his life every day for Germany."[166]

In the past, Hitler had not acted on warnings from NSDAP subordinates about the general staff's disloyalty. A military liaison officer in the propaganda ministry, Colonel Hans Martin, recalled that Goebbels claimed to "possess a great amount of irrefutable evidence that a defeatist attitude among many officers of the OKW, especially in the OKH, is assuming serious proportions."[167] The Führer nonetheless shielded them from attacks by Goebbels and Himmler. The officers had sworn an oath of fealty to him, and "he firmly believed in their code of loyalty and honor," wrote another Goebbels aid, Wilfred von Oven.[168] Addressing the Rastenburg staff on July 24, Jodl told how whenever suspicions had surfaced about particular officers, Hitler had "laughed it off good-naturedly... as with the case of General Fellgiebel, who had already brought attention to himself through some of his remarks."[169]

The Führer expressed bitterness over the affair to his staff: "I took over the old officer corps just as it was, preserved its traditions, and respected them," he said. "I advanced the officers' careers and their economic status whenever I could. I recognized their achievements and rewarded them. I promoted and decorated them. Each of them who reported to me I shook hands with as a comrade. And now every officer up to general who comes to me I have to have searched in a vestibule first, in case he's bringing in some killing device like this Count Stauffenberg, who had nothing better to do than sneak a bomb under my conference table to rid the world of me and his own comrades."[170]

The German public reacted to news of the assassination attempt "with horror and loathing," the former *Gauleiter* Rudolf Jordan recorded in his autobiography. "In the evening I addressed the population outdoors in the cathedral square in Magdeburg. The whole town took part in this demonstration of loyalty, with deep emotion. It seemed to me that in view of the fateful, life-or-death situation of the war, the people stood behind Adolf Hitler as one." The Lutheran bishop of Hannover, who was personally unsympathetic to National Socialism, publicly condemned Stauffenberg's "criminal scheme."[171]

At Carlshof hospital, Hitler visited officers who had been seriously injured in the July 20 bombing. He offered General Karl Bodenschatz an analysis of the murder plot: "I know that Stauffenberg, Goerdeler, and Witzleben thought through my death to rescue the German nation. . . . But these people really had no fixed plan of what to do next. They had no idea which army would support their coup, which military district would help them. First of all, they had not established contact with the enemy. I've even found out that the enemy refused their offer to negotiate."[172]

Hitler's information was accurate. In April 1941, the Reich's Foreign Office assigned Hans Buwert to manage France's Hachette Publishing House. In late 1942 the Berlin police chief, Count Heinrich Helldorf, and a general staff officer, Count Heinrich Dohna-Tolksdorf, brought him into Stulpnagel's circle. Buwert met with Allied representatives during a trip to Spain and Portugal. "Contact with the Allies turned out badly," he wrote later.[173]

In the summer of 1940, the Churchill cabinet had adopted the policy of "absolute silence" toward the German resistance.[174] Even before the war, the British Foreign Office had cautioned against such an alliance. In November 1938, Undersecretary Sargent had warned in a memo, "An open and capable military dictatorship could be even more dangerous than the NS regime."[175]

The subversives encountered another obstacle with respect to the United States. At the Casablanca conference in January 1943, Roosevelt publicly announced that the Allies will accept nothing less than the Reich's unconditional surrender. What this portended for Germany, FDR's private notes from December 1944 reveal: "Whatever measures may be

taken against Japan and Germany, they must in any case include the reduction of their industrial output, to prevent them from competing on the world markets against the English, French, Dutch, Belgians, and other exporters, and against us as well." U.S. General Albert Wedemeyer wrote, "The western Allies made not the slightest attempt to divide the Germans by promising the enemies of the Hitler regime acceptable peace terms."[176]

The Allies' attitude was no secret to members of the resistance movement. Count Ulrich Schwerin von Schwanefeld, a staff officer and determined advocate of Hitler's murder, continued his intrigues even though acknowledging that FDR will not mollify surrender conditions.[177] Just two days before Stauffenberg bombed Hitler's situation conference, the conspirator Otto John returned from fruitless negotiations with Allied representatives in Madrid. He informed his fellow plotters than even were the Führer dead, unconditional surrender is still in force.[178] He ultimately acknowledged that "the internal German resistance against Hitler was no longer a factor of significance for the political and military strategy of the western powers... in contrast to the resistance in France, which was nurtured by the western powers morally and with all kinds of materiel."[179]

The staff officer Tresckow, who described Hitler as "a mad dog that has to be put down," also realized that the demise of his commander-in-chief would have no influence on the Allies' war effort.[180] Dr. Eugen Gerstenmaier, a former conspirator and president of the West German parliament after the war, stated in a 1975 interview, "What we in the German resistance during the war didn't really want to see, we learned in full measure afterward; that this war was ultimately not waged against Hitler, but against Germany."[181]

Right after Stauffenberg's botched assassination attempt, British radio stations for Europe broadcast the names of Germans known to the English to be conspiring against Hitler.[182] This enabled the Gestapo to round up the subversives more quickly. A BBC editorial dismissed the coup as a product of Prussia's military caste, the very stratum which the Anglo-Saxons are waging war to eradicate. The German people, the BBC continued, would be deceiving themselves to entrust their leadership to such people. Fritz Hesse, a specialist on English affairs in the German

Foreign Office, monitored the Allied reaction and ventured, “Not much further and the English and American radios would have congratulated Hitler on his survival.” The Führer, shocked at the hostility manifest in some Allied news coverage, remarked to Ribbentrop, “These people hate Germany even more than they do me."[183]

On July 25, John Wheeler-Bennett, a British historian assisting the Foreign Office in London, submitted a memorandum on the consequences of the recent events at Rastenburg: “It may now be said with some definiteness that we are better off with things as they are than if the plot of July 20 had succeeded and Hitler had been assassinated. . . . The Gestapo and the SS have done us an appreciable service in removing a selection of those who would undoubtedly have posed as 'good' Germans after the war. . . . It is to our advantage therefore that the purge should continue, since the killing of Germans by Germans will save us from future embarrassment of many kinds."[184] Churchill, Eden, and the Foreign Office staff accepted Wheeler-Bennett’s viewpoint.[185] An in-house analysis prepared by the OSS also regarded Hitler’s escape as a blessing, explaining that it robbed the conspiring German generals of the opportunity to dump the blame for losing the war on him alone.[186]

One German general who clearly understood the Allies' outlook was Walter von Brauchitsch, commander of the army until December 1941. In April 1940, Halder had presented him with a written proposal to overthrow Hitler and reach a settlement with the West. Brauchitsch rebuked him with the words, “What’s going on here is pure treason. . . . In wartime this is unthinkable for a soldier. This battle isn't about governments anyway, but a battle of diametrical ways of life. So getting rid of Hitler will serve no purpose."[187]

A Contrast of Motives

In July 1944, the armed forces journal *Offiziere des Führers (Officers of the Führer)* published an essay by Walter Gross of the Racial Policy Office. It presented the usual argument that bloodlines contribute more to a person’s intrinsic characteristics and qualities of leadership than academics and material circumstances. With respect to the military, Gross added this: “On the Führer’s orders, the officer’s career became open to

every German man without consideration of social origin and education. Some expressed misgivings. They saw this as the intrusion of a radical socialist principle, and a danger to the accomplishments and bearing of the officer corps. Dozens of times I've encountered objections to this National Socialist innovation; objections from those who point to the lofty, inherent value of a leadership class cultivated over generations of selecting the best from soldiers' and officers' families.”

Gross parried this protest with the observation that any traditional, exclusive system stifles the development of unexplored human resources within the nation: “Beyond such socially elevated families, there also rests within a people thousands upon thousands of individuals of comparable aptitude, submerged in the broad masses. They possess the same value to the community and are capable of accomplishing just as much in a particular field as the best of the old, cultivated families. . . .Wherever people with similar and equally precious qualities lie undiscovered, then it is possible and indeed necessary to find them, and place them in communal life. With the right training, they can achieve the utmost they're capable of. . . . The standard for determining whether the inherent prerequisites are present or are lacking, is one and the same for both groups; it lies exclusively in accomplishing the task at hand."[188]

When Hitler reinstated national defense before the war, the men occupying positions of command had entered service during the time of the old army. Many senior officers displayed little imagination or adaptability to warfare’s innovations such as armor, aviation, and elastic defense. Their shortcomings became especially apparent in the campaign against Soviet Russia. Some generals lacked the boldness, initiative, and raw nerve to outthink, outmaneuver, and outfight such an imposing military goliath and were dismissed. Replacing them were often men from ordinary backgrounds. Hitler himself stated in January 1944, “More than 60 percent of the new officer corps rose through the ranks, creating a bridge to the hundreds of thousands of workers, farmers and members of the lesser middle class."[189]

Though deprived of imperial privilege, the scions of Germany’s distinguished families retained their ancestral honors, and found the same path of opportunity open to them as to all of their countrymen. Most men of their younger generation dutifully entered frontline service during

World War II, doing credit to their traditional standing. The inveterate conservatives and reactionaries among the aristocracy gravitated to the diplomatic corps and to the general staff, where they could inflict maximum damage to the German cause at minimal risk. Solitary and aloof, the resistance movement allied itself with the only group capable of destroying the social revolution that had transformed Germany: the enemy. To topple a form of government, the subversives accepted the enemy's war aims, with all the consequences for their own country.

During a session with the Western Allies in Madrid on April 17, 1944, the conspirator Otto John asked that the demand for unconditional surrender be rescinded. The Anglo-American representatives replied that they intend to allow the Russians to be the first to invade Germany and enter Berlin. The Germans deserve to be punished, they maintained, and the job was better left to the Soviets.[190] The Russians discharged the task as follows: In October 1944, the German 4th Army repulsed an offensive toward Königsberg in East Prussia by the Soviet 11th Guards Army. Recapturing Nemmersdorf, German soldiers discovered 72 murdered civilians, including the ravaged bodies of young women whom the Russians had nailed to barn doors.[191]

In Schillmeyszen in the Memel territory, the German artillery gunner Erich Czerkus was among the counterattacking troops re-entering the village, which was his home town. This is what he discovered after the withdrawal of the Soviet 93rd Rifle Corps: "I found my father in a barn, lying face-down with a bullet hole in his neck. In a stall lay dead a man and a woman with their hands tied behind their back, both bound together by a rope. In another farm we saw five children with their tongues nailed to a large table. Despite a desperate search I found no trace of my mother. While looking, we saw five girls bound together with rope. Their clothing was completely stripped away and their backs badly lacerated. It appeared that the girls had been dragged a long distance."[192] The Germans documented countless other atrocities.

The Soviets renewed the invasion of East Prussia in January 1945. They surrounded Königsberg. The German army conducted a relief operation beginning on February 19. Several German divisions, including the 5th Panzer, simultaneously attacked outward from the invested city. In the

town of Metgethen, advancing troops recovered the bodies of 32 women whom the Russians had raped, murdered, and thrown into a shell crater. Master Sergeant Kurt Göring, a German tank commander participating in the attack, offered this testimony: “Then we reached Metgethen. We were appalled to see what had happened here. At the rail station was a refugee train standing on the tracks, with women and young girls. They had all been raped and murdered. We wrote on the side of the rail car, 'Avenge Metgethen.' The fighting went on without quarter."[193]

Another eyewitness participating in local German counterattacks was Sergeant Günther Adam, who recalled this: “We attacked and recaptured a town displaying the same crimes of these beasts. On a snow-covered, trampled-down village street was what remained of a young woman. It looked as though she was wearing a fur coat. She was lying on her back, her arms and legs outstretched. (The Soviets) had run her over with a tank and crushed her. This bloody, ground-up mass was frozen solid and the most horrible thing I ever saw during the war.... In a house, we found some men who had been beaten to death. In blood-soaked beds were ravaged women, who were still alive. Then worst of all, we found the head of a baby spiked to a bed-post.” [194]



After driving the Soviets from a Prussian village in a counterattack, German troops discovered the mutilated corpses of civilians massacred by the Red Army. Soviet atrocities were commonplace throughout the war.

Red Army units overrunning German POW camps ruthlessly impressed the Russian inmates into first wave infantry battalions, or treated them as deserters. At the Alt-Drewitz camp, they fired on 30 American prisoners whom the German guards had failed to evacuate, killing some. This was the Soviet army, which Stauffenberg, Olbricht and their associates enabled to enter Germany.

The Western powers also waged war against German civilians, but from the air. In July 1943, the British Royal Air Force and the U.S. Army's 8th Air Force conducted several nearly consecutive bombing missions against Hamburg. In the bombardment 30,482 residents perished by being blown

apart, incinerated, asphyxiated, or buried by rubble. Among them were 5,586 children. Fires destroyed 24 hospitals, 277 schools, and 58 churches.[195] An officer assisting in the evacuation of refugees described how some passenger cars carried grey-haired children, aged practically overnight from the terrors of the raid.[196]

Among the eyewitnesses was Gerd Bucerius of the resistance movement. In a Hamburg suburb, he watched the approach of the English bombers from his rooftop: “Finally, I shouted! Too long I have waited for the Allies to destroy the world-enemy Hitler. . . . What horror, what sorrow, I naturally thought back then. But also, you dead want it this way. And whom did I worry about during the attack? The pilots! They were valiant and did what I had hoped of them."[197] After the war, the U.S. Army conducted a survey of German morale. Responding to the query about what caused the population the greatest suffering under Hitler, 91 percent of Germans who were polled cited Allied air raids. Just two percent completing the questionnaire marked “loss of freedom” or “Nazi crimes."[198]

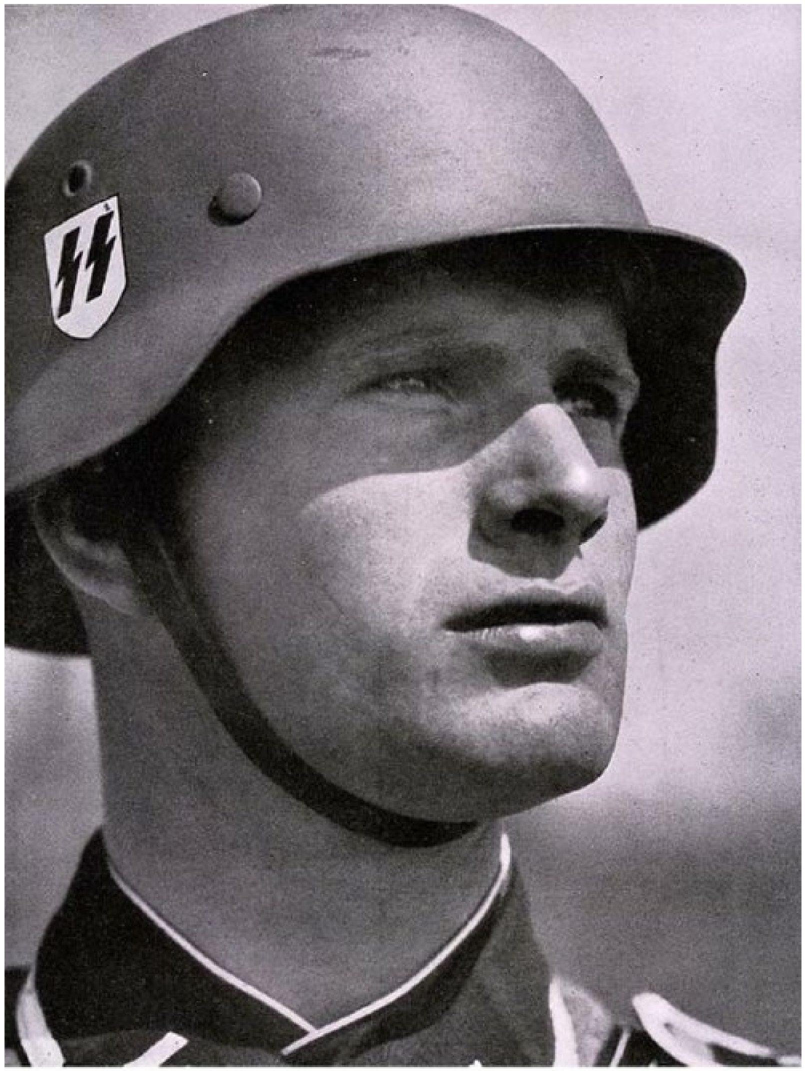
“July 20 demonstrated that thoughts about high treason had no roots in the majority of the people,” Schwarz van Berk summarized. “What deprived the would-be usurpers of the last grain of sympathy was the clearly apparent intention of those involved not to risk their lives for what they claimed was an urgent necessity in the interests of their country, but to personally survive and satisfy their ambition for future positions of authority.” This SS officer also emphasized that the Gestapo was not the force that maintained cohesion and kept the Germans in line. This, he argued, was an illusion nurtured among those opposing the government. “The people and the troops fought bitterly and doggedly in the awareness that this struggle was literally a question of national and personal existence. Especially on the eastern front, there were as good as no deserters in the front lines. There were practically no saboteurs on the workbenches in the armaments factories at home. . . . The nation stood as never before in common cause, summoning all its moral strength to survive."[199]

Of the 70 military officers implicated in the plot to overthrow or assassinate Hitler, 55 were aristocrats.[200] This class-conscious clique

resorted to sabotage, treason, and murder to achieve its ends. Also dissatisfied with elements of the Reich's foreign and domestic policies were members of the Waffen SS. Youthful and idealistic, they fought both to preserve their continent from foreign invasion and for revolutionary change, not to restore anachronistic distinctions in title and rank of the former imperial age. The SS men promoted their social and political agenda through loyalty, service, and sacrifice. They gained influence through courage and commitment, working within the legal framework to reform rather than destroy the existing order. They were prepared to give up more than they expected to gain as individuals, for the benefit and growth of the European community.

A comparison of two persons, one an icon of the resistance and the other an ordinary German infantryman, illuminates the essence of the contrast: The son of a prominent psychiatrist, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer covertly assisted the *Abwehr* in its intrigues against the German cause. His relatives traded profitably on the black market. Visiting Geneva in 1941, he told fellow clerics, "The Christian faith must be rescued, even if an entire nation must perish" (He apparently saw no contradiction in aiding the Soviets).... "I pray for the defeat of my fatherland."[201] Nowhere near the fighting front, Bonhoeffer occasionally travelled and enjoyed a comfortable existence until April 1943, when the authorities jailed him for undermining the war effort.

In August 1940, the 17-year old Fritz Hahl volunteered for the Waffen SS. Assigned to the *Wiking* division, he saw his first action against the Red Army on July 1, 1941. During the balance of the war, Hahl was on the front line 861 days. He suffered seven wounds in combat. He wrote after the war, "Today I can no longer comprehend how as a young man from 17 to 22 years of age, I found the strength to keep my self-control again and again, to conquer my fears and then continue fighting, and despite the setbacks still believe in a good outcome. One argument alone determined my actions and those of my generation: Together with my troops, like all German soldiers, we wanted to protect our homeland with its women and children from the Soviets - and without regard for ourselves."[202]



The countenance of a Waffen SS corporal reflects the ruggedness and resolve that characterized the European volunteers of this elite fighting force.

The Legacy

Upon Germany's surrender in May 1945, Allied occupational forces began the mass arrest, interrogation, and imprisonment of thousands of Germans who had been variously affiliated with the National Socialist government. Among those detained was the renowned authority on international law, Friedrich Grimm. Ten years before, Hitler had solicited his counsel when planning to reinstitute compulsory military service. Now Grimm sat opposite an Allied officer who showed him samples of new leaflets printed by the victors. They were in German language for distribution throughout

the conquered country. Describing German war crimes, the flyers were the first step in the re-education program designed for Germany. Grimm suggested that since the war was over, it was time to stop the libel. “Why no, we're just getting started,” the officer replied. “We'll continue this atrocity campaign, we'll increase it till no one will want to hear a good word about the Germans anymore, till whatever sympathy there is for you in other countries is completely destroyed, and until the Germans themselves become so mixed up they won't know what they're doing!"[203]

The perpetual campaign of negative publicity kept old wounds open for decades. To this day, it precludes objective analysis of a system developed by one of our most advanced, productive, and creative civilizations, which raised it from economic distress and social discord after World War I to prosperity and harmony within a few short years. In the aftermath of the 1939-1945 war, which deeply scarred the countries that fought, decimating the younger generation of some, there is merit in exploring notable elements of the ideologies involved. The lessons learned may contribute to a better understanding among peoples for the future.

With respect to Germany, much can be gained from investigating not just what Hitler did, but *why*. Condemning the National Socialist state as a criminal abomination was the precursor to the present mindset that non-democratic governments are unenlightened at best, as tyrannies withholding freedom from the population or as “rogue states.” To esteem liberal democracy as humanity’s crowning political achievement leads to complacency, diminishing in its supporters the self-critical eye so useful for correction and improvement.

Reform is a product of restlessness and dissatisfaction. This was the genesis of the Enlightenment, the intellectual challenge to the royal regimen that had barred the common people from opportunity. First to give political expression to new ideas were the American colonists, unaccustomed to immoderate authority, and the French, spirited and self-assured. Their governments shifted focus to advancing the individual, contrary to the monarchial structure maintaining the control of an exclusive, self-serving minority.

In Germany, the enlightened age evolved differently. The Germans' contemplative, methodical approach led to a gradual integration of liberal

values with elements of the old order. Flanked by powerful neighboring states, a strong central authority was still necessary to preserve national independence. Together with the unification of the Reich in 1871, liberalism enabled the Germans to mature and prosper. The royal house, unable to keep pace with the progress of the times, failed dismally in foreign policy and at waging war, and ultimately vanished in 1918. The Weimar Republic, shackled by crippling tribute to the Allies, was unable to restore prosperity.

Dissatisfied, the Germans turned to a new ideology. When Hitler came to power, which was by no means an easy and rapid process, he more or less occupied a political vacuum. He reached beyond democracy and the imperial era, reviving ideas of the German intellectual movement of the early 19th Century. The National Socialists promoted individual liberty, but not a laissez faire policy regarding commerce; profit and advancement at the expense of the community they considered detrimental and discordant. "Liberalism indeed paved the way for economic progress, but simultaneously abetted the social fragmentation of nations," concluded the protocol of the Science of Labor Institute's conference at Bad Salzbrunn in March 1944. "The starting point for any orderly society is the people's collective good; it subordinates all individual interests. It insures life and progress of the personality. Social policy can therefore not be limited to serve only the momentary advantage of particular persons or groups."[204]

Performing one's "duty to work" was the prerequisite for belonging to the national community and benefiting from citizenship. This complimented the traditional German work ethic, which seeks fulfillment in creative endeavor and industriousness. The National Socialists defined education as "opening the road to social advancement." Among the academic institutions were leadership schools. These based enrollment more on the sound moral character of the pupil than on scholastic performance. Stressing patriotism and communal service, discouraging egocentric or elitist attitudes, educators trained the young to place the welfare of all before personal gain, to respect group achievement over individual accomplishment. In this way, they hoped to produce future leaders who would not abuse their authority but sincerely regard the public trust as a sacred responsibility. These were values applicable for both political careers and in private enterprise.

No matter how promising a state form may appear on paper, the integrity of the men in charge significantly determines the benefit of its programs. Though he set the standards for the social and political structure of the new Germany, Hitler afforded subordinates considerable latitude to implement fresh ideas and modifications. He allowed competition among government agencies with overlapping jurisdiction. He intervened only after the rivals had demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of their opposing viewpoints, and then usually in favor of the more revolutionary solution.

Encouraging initiative, Hitler inspired unconventional thinking and risk-taking from those in authority. Thus he backed Fritz Reinhardt's novel economic proposals against those of the conformist Schacht. The Führer cast his lot with Robert Ley, after years of his DAF leader's grappling with the conservative labor ministry over increasing expenditures to improve workers' social welfare. He approved founding the Adolf Hitler Schools, which disregarded the ministry of education's curriculum and didn't even teach the NSDAP program. Himself a nationalist, Hitler did not interfere as the Waffen SS gradually dismantled nationalism and challenged the racial policy of the National Socialist party.

At times, the German leader actually seemed reluctant to exercise the power he possessed. Even during wartime military conferences with the generals on his staff, some of whom he considered cowards, the Führer seldom dropped the hammer. Adjutant Colonel Below wrote, "Hitler rarely gave a direct order. He confined himself to persuading his listeners so that they would come to the same point of view. . . . After December 1941, when Hitler took command of the army, he only gradually accomplished his purposes through direct orders. He still tried to win conference participants for his intentions in part through lengthy explanations."[205]

Hitler sometimes displayed a willingness to acquiesce to contradictory viewpoints, demonstrating the latitude he granted party and state functionaries. In 1933, Reinhardt's "Now Program" offered young women financial incentives to leave their jobs to marry and start families. This enabled out-of-work men to fill the vacated positions, helping relieve unemployment. Once the work force was fully employed, the government continued sponsoring programs to keep women in the home, both to promote traditional family life and to maintain a healthy national

birthrate. To be sure, prior to 1933 Hitler had already warned the NSDAP's male members that he would not tolerate any further perceptions of women as "baby-making machines or playthings."[206] As chancellor, he facilitated opportunities for the female gender to pursue vocational careers, though restricting them from politics. Germany still maintained certain previous discrepancies, however, such as reduced salaries for women performing the same job as men.

During World War II, German women filled many positions in the armaments industry, on a lower wage scale, as more males entered military service. In April 1944, Ley, who had campaigned for equal pay for women for years, confronted Hitler on the subject. The Führer explained that Germany's planned post-war social structure envisions women as the hub of the family, adding that this does not imply a negative opinion of their intelligence or occupational capability. Ley retorted that successful German women have a modern cognizance of their role in society and consider Hitler's ideas archaic. In the course of the meeting, Ley tenaciously defended his stand against an avalanche of counter-arguments his leader presented. The Führer finally relented by offering a compromise, that women should receive less base pay, but be eligible for incentive awards and bonuses to compensate for the disparity.[207] In general, Hitler's personal view had little influence on developments: In the winter semester of 1943/44 for example, 49.5 percent of students enrolled in German universities were women.[208]



A young German woman employed in an ammunition factory. The influx of women into the armaments industry led to new laws in 1942 to protect them in the workplace.

In most governments, politicians promising reform are the least anxious to implement it. Few of them wish to improve a system through which they attained prominence. Those who succeed in a particular political milieu are the mortal enemies of change. Hitler stood against this custom. A child of the working class, he led the NSDAP to power without compromising with democratic factions in the Weimar Republic. Once chancellor, he owed no loyalty to the political parties entrenched in the government or to special interest groups in industry and commerce. Though consolidating his authority, Hitler did not create a system designed to perpetuate it. Through frequent public speeches, he used his station to inspire the Germans with love of country, appreciation for the

nobility of work, and a sense of belonging. He believed that once these values guided his countrymen, it would be possible to gradually relax state controls.

The government's role was not to secure the continuous supremacy of a dominant party or class, but to discover society's more creative and trustworthy elements and promote their careers. This was to be an eternal process, guaranteeing that fresh blood and new ideas steadily flow forth from the wellspring of the population. Wrote the philosopher Nietzsche, who endeavored so ardently to kindle the German psyche, "When a nation genuinely leaps forward and grows, each time it bursts the cordon that had till then defined its repute and standing as a people. But when a nation retains much that is fixed, then this is proof that it prefers to stagnate."[209]

The Enlightenment instructed mankind that governments deserve obedience only insofar as they discharge their responsibility to serve the public. In democracy, Western civilization believes it has achieved the state structure that holds those in power to this obligation. Liberal nations more or less abide by this arrangement, no longer exploring or tolerating alternatives. Somewhere in their development, they stopped short of the comprehension that no single form of government is best for every age or for every culture. To be truly representative, a system must conform to the character and requirements of the people in its charge, and not vice versa.

Hitler also accepted liberalism as important for nurturing the inventive impulse of humanity. He wanted each generation to advance and mature, every individual motivated to realize his or her potential while rising together as a community. He demanded two prerequisites: one, that society become educated in a spirit of civic responsibility, and two, that the state encourage profound reverence for German history, art and ethnic traditions, to keep his countrymen on the evolutionary course that molded them into a proud and unified people. The historically maligned leader of National Socialist Germany interpreted the duty of government as to foster, never restrict, the creative energy of a nation and to expedite its progress, for without progress there is no future and in the future rests the hope for a better life. This was the substance of Hitler's revolution.

Footnotes

(PRO *refers to the Public Record Office in London*. BD *refers to British Documents on Foreign Policy)*

Chapter 1

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424

129. Wöfur kämpfen wir?, p. 20

Chapter 2

1. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, 205
2. Kaden, Ernst, Des Deutschen Volkes Heldenkampf, p. 113
3. Fuller, J.F.C, The Second World War, P. 19
4. Franz-Willing, Georg, Umsturz 1933, P. 28
5. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, pp. 44-45
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7. Schweiger, Helmut, Mythos Waffen SS, p. 11
8. Bainville, Jacques, Frankreichs Kriegsziel, p. 38
9. Veale, Frederick, Advance to Barbarism, p. 147
10. Ziegler, Wilhelm, Los von Versailles, p. 14
11. Ponsonby, Arthur, Falsehood in Wartime, p. 59
12. Schauwecker, Franz, So war der Krieg, p. 142
13. Reinhardt, Fritz, Die Beseitigung der Arbeitslosigkeit im Dritten Reich, p. 75
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15. Die braune Platte, "Appell an die Nation"
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108. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 246

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110. Klüver, Max, Den Sieg verspielt, pp. 87, 88

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120. Bagel-Bohlen, Anja, Hitlers industrielle Kriegsvorbereitungen, p. 105

121. Schustereit, Hartmut, Vabanque, p. 74

122. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 32

123. Reinhardt, Fritz, Die Beseitigung der Arbeitslosigkeit im Dritten Reich, p. 70

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125. Bagel-Bohlen, Anja, Hitlers industrielle Kriegsvorbereitungen, pp. 134, 135

126. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 252

127. Reinhardt, Fritz, Die Beseitigung der Arbeitslosigkeit im Dritten Reich, p. 70

128. Klüver, Max, Vom Klassenkampf zur Volksgemeinschaft, p. 58

129. Schoenbaum, David, Die braune Revolution, p. 138

130. Langer, William and Gleason, Everett, The Challenge to Isolation, p. 166

131. Schaub, Julius, In Hitlers Schatten, pp. 15-16

132. Kern, Erich, Adolf Hitler und seine Bewegung, p. 48

133. Der Schulungsbrief 1/1937, pp. 6, 7

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Chapter 3

1. Schoenfelder, Roland, Deutschlands Ja für den Frieden, p. 66

2. Hitler, Adolf, Rede des Führers vor dem Reichstag am 28. April 1939, p. 60

3. Benns, F. Lee, European History since 1870, p. 489

4. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 80

5. Freytagh-Loringhoven, Freiherr von, Deutschlands Aussenpolitik, p. 207

6. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 233

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12. Römer, Heinrich, Rhein Reich Frankreich, p. 19

13. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Grossdeutschland 1938, p. 311

14. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 253

15. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 256

16. Freytagh-Loringhoven, Freiherr von, Deutschlands Aussenpolitik, pp. 8-9

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21. Tansill, Charles, Die Hintertür zum Kriege, p. 30

22. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 267

23. Bömer, Karl, Das Dritte Reich im Spiegel der Weltpresse, p. 122

24. Schoenfelder, Roland, Deutschlands Ja für den Frieden, pp. 7, 8

25. Reipert, Fritz, Was will Frankreich?, p. 41

26. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, pp. 118-119

27. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 268

28. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, p. 27

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38. Stieve, Friedrich, What the World Rejected, pp. 6-7

39. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 104

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53. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 208

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55. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 51

56. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 213

57. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 119

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60. BD Second Series, XIX No.506

61. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 215

62. Taylor, A.J.P, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 144

63. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 62

64. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 219

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68. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 222

69. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 127

70. Schutter, Fritz, Wir woll'n das Wort nicht brechen, p. 93

71. Ibid, p. 92

72. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 217

73. Freytagh-Loringhoven, Freiherr von, Deutschlands Aussenpolitik, p. 147

74. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 61

75. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 285

76. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 52

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81. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 80

82. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 169

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87. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, p. 802

88. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 280

89. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 126

90. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 154

91. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 289

92. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 190

93. BD I, Third Series, 86

94. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 206

95. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 76

96. PRO FO 371/20375 C 5216

97. BD I, Third Series, 86

98. PRO CAB 27/623

99. PRO CAB 23/93 cab 21138

100. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 227

101. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 159

102. Henderson, Nevile, Failure of a Mission, p. 137

103. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 237

104. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 93

105. Henderson, Nevile, Failure of a Mission, p. 142

106. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, pp. 96-97

107. BD II, Third Series, 665

108. Henderson, Nevile, Failure of a Mission, p. 142

109. Hitler, Adolf, Reden des Führers am Parteitag Grossdeutschland, pp. 77-78

110. Henderson, Nevile, Failure of a Mission, p. 131

111. BD II, Third Series, 8

112. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 107

113. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 260

114. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, p. 171

115. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 173

116. BD II, Third Series, 1038

117. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, p. 166

118. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 262

119. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 119

120. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 275

121. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 122

122. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 280

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124. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, p. 184

125. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 160

126. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, pp. 313-315, 304

127. Ibid, p. 334

128. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 163

129. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 304

130. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 129

131. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 161

132. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 340

133. Ibid, p. 342

134. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 248

135. Umbreit, Hans, Deutsche Militärverwaltungen 1938-1939, pp. 59, 56, 54

136. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 251

137. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 344

138. Ibid, p. 344

139. Umbreit, Hans, Deutsche Militärverwaltungen 1938-1939, p. 55

140. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 242

141. Ruhnau, Rudiger, Die freie Stadt Danzig, p. 9

142. Bainville, Jacques, Frankreichs Kriegsziel, p. 53

143. Watt, Richard, Bitter Glory, pp. 93, 99

144. Venner, Dominique, Söldner ohne Sold, p. 217

145. Oertzen, F.W., Die deutschen Freikorps, p. 132

146. Watt, Richard, Bitter Glory, p. 158

147. Venner, Dominique, Söldner ohne Sold, p. 222

148. Der Tod sprach polnisch, p. 9

149. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 84

150. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 401

151. Elble, Rolf, Die Schlacht an der Bzura, p. 41

152. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 20

153. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 147

154. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 405

155. Schoenfelder, Roland, Deutschlands Ja für den Frieden, pp. 67-68

156. Tansill, Charles, Die Hintertür zum Kriege, p. 178

157. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 30

158. Ibid.

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160. Ibid, p. 31

161. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, pp. 376-377

162. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 115

163. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 399

164. Klüver, Max, Es war nicht Hitlers Krieg, p. 8

165. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 246

166. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 176

167. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 131

168. Ibid, p. 397

169. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 221

170. Ibid, p. 420

171. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 247

172. Klüver, Max, Es war nicht Hitlers Krieg, p. 11

173. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 423

174. Ibid, p. 422

175. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 268

176. Ruhnau, Rudiger, Die freie Stadt Danzig, p. 163

177. Hitler, Adolf, Rede des Führers und Reichskanzlers am 28. April 1939, pp. 36-37

178. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 44

179. Wellems, Hugo, Das Jahrhundert der Lüge, p. 117

180. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 45

181. Der Tod sprach polnisch, pp. 18, 23

182. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 426

183. Klüver, Max, Es war nicht Hitlers Krieg, pp. 53-54

184. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 193

185. Ibid, p. 404

186. Kern, Erich, Adolf Hi tier und das Dritte Reich, p. 365

187. Piekalkiewicz, Janusz, Polenfeldzug, p. 44

188. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 194

189. Wellems, Hugo, Das Jahrhundert der Lüge, p. 119

190. Ibid, pp. 122, 119

191. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 251

192. Ibid, p. 271, 273

193. Ruhnau, Rudiger, Die freie Stadt Danzig, p. 76

194. Ibid, p. 318

195. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 413

196. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 324

197. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 210

198. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 277

199. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 476

200. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 258

201. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 333

202. BD VII, Third Series, 4

203. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 211

204. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 442

205. Sudholt, Gerd, So war der Zweite Weltkrieg 1939, p. 57

206. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 319

207. Preradovich, Nikolaus, Deutschland und Polen, p. 212

208. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 320

209. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 500

210. Sturm, Gero, Mit Goldener Nahkampfspange Werner Kindler, p. 20

211. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, pp. 505, 506

212. Ibid, pp. 513-514

213. Meiser, Hans, Gescheiterte Friedens-Initiativen 1939-1945, p. 32

214. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, pp. 361-362, 305

215. Meiser, Hans, Gescheiterte Friedens-Initiativen 1939-1945, p. 33

216. Ibid.

217. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 527

218. PRO FO 371/22979 C 12480

219. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 423

220. Freytagh-Loringhoven, Freiherrn von, Deutschlands Aussenpolitik, p. 234

221. Danco, Walter, Der Weltveränderer, p. 200

222. Freytagh-Loringhoven, Freiherrn von, Deutschlands Aussenpolitik, p. 233

223. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, p. 1275

224. Giesler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, p. 366

225. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 345

226. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 414

Chapter 4

1. Pahl, Walther, Die britishe Machtpolitik, p. 22

2. Helberg, Hermann, England und wir, pp. 42-43

3. Pahl, Walther, Die britishe Machtpolitik, pp. 16-17

4. Thost, Hans, Als Nationalsozialist in England, pp. 165, 183

5. Ibid, p. 272

6. Ibid, p. 223

7. Kessemeier, Heinrich, Der Feldzug mit der anderen Waffe, p. 156

8. Helberg, Hermann, England und wir, p. 128

9. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 123

10. Rose, Franz, Das ist Churchill, pp. 76-77

11. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 66

12. Winkelvoss, Peter, Die Weltherrschaft der Angelsachsen, p. 153

13. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 225

14. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 222

15. Ibid, p. 221

16. Ibid, p. 220

17. Ibid, p. 222

18. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 223

19. Klüver, Max, Den Sieg verspielt, p. 39

20. Charmley, John, Churchill: The End of Glory, p. 325

21. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 239

22. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 209

23. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 103

24. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Das tschechisch-deutsche Drama, p. 311

25. PRO CAB 23/95 cab 43 (38)

26. Rose, Franz, Das ist Churchill, p. 78

27. Kriegk, Otto, Die englischen Kriegshetzer, p. 65

28. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, pp. 107-108

29. Halifax, Viscount, Fullness of Days, p. 200

30. PRO FO 371/22988

31. Ibid.

32. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 102

33. Ibid, p. 301

34. PRO CAB 23/98 cab 12 (39)

35. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 300

36. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 196

37. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 301

38. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 196

39. PRO FO 800/294

40. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 388

41. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 284

42. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 417

43. PRO CAB 23/98 cab 11 (39)

44. Taylor, A.J.P, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 205

45. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 304

46. Taylor, A.J.P, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 205

47. Hoggan, David, The Forced War, p. 304

48. Taylor, A.J.P, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 186

49. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, p. 932

50. PRO FO 371/22993

51. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 197

52. PRO CAB 23/98 cab 12 (39)

53. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 391

54. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 222

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58. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 162

59. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 402

60. PRO FO 371/23017 c6454

61. PRO FO 371/23017 c5469

62. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 455

63. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, p. 1065

64. PRO FO 371/22988

65. PRO FO 371/22989 c6670

66. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, p. 332

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68. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 194

69. PRO FO 371/22976 C11573

70. PRO FO 371/23017

71. PRO FO 371/23019

72. Wellems, Hugo, Das Jahrhundert der Lüge, p. 123

73. Klüver, Max, Es war nicht Hitlers Krieg, p. 180

74. PRO FO 371/22974 c9475

75. PRO FO 371/22991

76. PRO FO 371/22019 C16211

77. Wanderscheck, Hermann, Höllenmaschinen aus England, p. 78

78. PRO FO 371/22979 C12476

79. PRO FO 371/22976

80. PRO PREM 1/331A

81. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg?, p. 431

82. PRO FO 371/23026 cl1948

83. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 311

84. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 493

85. Ibid, p. 503

86. Ribbentrop, Annelies von, Die Kriegsschuld des Widerstandes, p. 345

87. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 508

88. Klüver, Max, War es Hitlers Krieg? p. 421

89. Tansill, Charles, Die Hintertür zum Kriege, p. 333

90. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 532

91. Ibid, p. 520

92. Ibid, p. 528

93. Ibid, p. 430

94. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 408

95. Ibid, p. 414

96. Ibid, p. 379

97. Ibid, p. 412

98. Ibid.

99. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 525

100. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 216

101. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 380

102. Helberg, Hermann, England und wir, p. 152

103. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 224

104. Ibid, p. 238

105. Bieg, Hans-Henning, Amerika die unheimliche Weltmacht, p. 160

106. Karski, Jan, The Great Powers and Poland, pp. 376-377

107. Piekalkiewicz, Janusz, Polenfeldzug, p. 123

108. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 241

109. Giesler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, p. 364

110. Bieg, Hans-Henning, Amerika die unheimliche Weltmacht, p. 103

111. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 14

112. Musial, Bognan, Kampfplatz Deutschland, p. 284

113. Ibid, p. 269

114. Weber, Hermann und Mählert, Ulrich, Verbrechen im Namen der Idee, p. 99

115. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, pp.111,128

116. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 25

117. Kurowski, Franz, Balkenkreuz und Roter Stern, p. 8

118. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 202

119. PRO FO 371/23022, C9571

120. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, pp. 303-304

121. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 131

122. Abendroth, Hans Henning, Hitler in der spanischen Arena, p. 28

123. Ibid, p. 15

124. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p.

96

125. Abendroth, Hans-Henning, Hitler in der spanischen Arena, p. 33

126. Suworov, Viktor, Stalins verhinderter Erstschlag, p. 89

127. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 150

128. Abendroth, Hans-Henning, Hitler in der spanischen Arena, p. 37

129. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 85

130. Abendroth, Hans-Henning, Hitler in der spanischen Arena, p. 35

131. Baberowski, Jörg, Der rote Terror, p. 174

132. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, pp. 12-13

133. Ibid, p. 72

134. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 102

135. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 277

136. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 136

137. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 200

138. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 107

139. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 209

140. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 91

141. Domaras, Max, Hitler Reden und Proklamationen, p. 1210

142. Thadden, Adolf von, Stalins Falle, pp. 77, 79

143. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 122

144. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 221

145. Ibid, p. 218, 226

146. Ibid, p. 230

147. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, p. 52

148. Hoffmann, Joachim, Stalins Vernichtungskrieg, pp. 144-145

149. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 451

150. “Deutschland und die finnische Frage,” Völkischer Beobachter, 12/8, 1939

151. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 203

152. Papst, Martin, Roter Terror, p. 78

153. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, pp. 221,218

154. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 147

155. Papst, Martin, Roter Terror, p. 78

156. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 126

157. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 145

158. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, pp. 114-115

159. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 185

160. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 153

161. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 126

162. Piekalkiewicz, Janusz, Krieg auf dem Balkan, p. 33

163. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 140

164. Ibid, p. 51

165. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, p. 70

166. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 113

167. Naumann, Andreas, Freispruch fur die deutsche Wehrmacht, p. 24

168. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 184

169. Fabry, Philipp, Balkan-Wirren, p. 93

170. Ibid, p. 62

171. Ibid, p. 95

172. Ibid, p. 131,99

173. Olshausen, Klaus, Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan, p. 86

174. Piekalkiewicz, Janusz, Krieg auf dem Balkan, p. 65

175. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, pp. 257, 256

176. Bathe, Rolf, Glodschey, Erich, Der Kampf um den Balkan, p. 126

177. Hunger, Heinz, Strassl, Erich, Kampf und Intrige um Griechenland, p. 104

178. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, p. 123

179. Ibid, p. 221

180. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 80

181. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 244

182. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, p. 179

183. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 243

184. Below, Nicolaus von, Als Hitlers Adjutant, p. 277

185. Ztirner, Bernhard, Der verschenkte Sieg, p. 14

186. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, pp. 242-243

187. Ibid, p. 225

188. Fabry, Philipp, Balkan-Wirren, p. 96

189. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, pp. 302-303

190. Ibid, p. 304

191. Post, Walter, Das Unternehmen Barbarossa, p. 263

192. Fabry, Philipp, Balkan-Wirren, p. 32

193. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 314

194. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, p. 118

195. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 430

196. Ibid, p. 305

197. Suworov, Viktor, Chmelnizki, Dmitrij, Überfall auf Europa, pp. 36-37, 52

198. Ibid, p. 58

199. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 279

200. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 310

201. Ibid, p. 300

202. Klüver, Max, Präventivschlag 1941, p. 14

203. Bavendamm, Dirk, Roosevelts Krieg, p. 80

204. Gordon, Helmut, Es spricht: Der Ftihrer, p. 70

205. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 241

206. Fuller, J.F.C, The Second World War, p. 29

207. Schadewaldt, Hans, Was will Roosevelt?, p. 53

208. Roosevelt, Elliot, As He Saw It, p. 37

209. Schweiger, Herbert, Mythos Waffen SS, p. 38

210. Bieg, Hans-Henning, Amerika die unheimliche Weltmacht, p. 105

211. Picker, Henry, Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier, p. 499

212. Wirsing, Giselher, Der masslose Kontinent, p. 66

213. Fish, Hamilton, FDR The Other Side of the Coin, p. 15

214. Ibid, p. 13

215. Franz-Willing, Georg, Roosevelt, p.31

216. Kunert, Dirk, Ein Weltkrieg wird vorprogrammiert, p. 233

217. Kunert, Dirk, Hitlers kalter Krieg, p. 212

218. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 229

219. Ibid, p. 247

220. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 172

221. Seibert, Theodor, Das amerikanische Rätsel, p. 28

222. Schultze-Rhonhof, Gerd, Der Krieg, der viele Väter hatte, p. 446

223. Ibid, p. 447

224. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 296

225. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 207

226. Tansill, Charles, Die Hintertür zum Kriege, p. 338

227. Fish, Hamilton, Tragic Deception, p. 11

228. Fish, Hamilton, FDR The Other Side of the Coin, p. 18

229. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Kriege der Kontinente, p. 233

230. Post, Walter, Die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges, p. 470

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243. Hedin, Sven, Amerika im Kampf der Kontinente, p. 92

244. Charmley, John, Churchill: The End of Glory, p. 443

245. Bieg, Hans-Henning, Amerika die unheimliche Weltmacht, p. 105

246. Wirsing, Giselher, Der masslose Kontinent, p. 306

247. Fish, Hamilton, FDR The Other Side of the Coin, p. xiv

248. Hedin, Sven, Amerika im Kampf der Kontinente, p. 106

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250. Bailey, Thomas, Ryan, Paul, Hitler vs. Roosevelt, p. 165

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252. Fish, Hamilton, Tragic Deception, p. 36

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255. Flynn, John, The Roosevelt Myth, p. 296

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257. Stinnett, Robert, Day of Deceit, p. 276

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259. Bailey, Thomas, Ryan, Paul, Hitler vs. Roosevelt, p. 235

260. Barnes, Harry Elmer, Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace, p. 345

261. Kurowski, Franz, So war der Zweite Weltkrieg 1941, p. 375

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263. Bavendamm, Dirk, Roosevelts Krieg, p. 168

264. Franz-Willing, Georg, Roosevelt, p. 112 Sudholt, Gert, So war der Zweite Weltkrieg 1942, pp. 267-268, 275

265. Bouhler, Philipp, Der grossdeutsche Freiheitskampf Band III, pp. 133-134

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Chapter 5

1. “Der Aufbau der Waffen SS", Völkischer Beobachter, März 14/15, 1942

2. Reinhardt, Fritz, Die Beseitigung der Arbeitslosigkeit im Dritten Reich, p. 213.

3. Ochsenreiter, Manual, Deutsche Militärzeitschrift: Sonderausgabe Waffen SS, p. 45

4. 4. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 408

5. Ochsenreiter, Manual, Deutsche Militärzeitschrift: Sonderausgabe Waffen SS, p. 47

6. Mathias, Karl Heinz, Ich diene, p. 56

7. Manner der Waffen SS, p. 40

8. Schutter, Fritz, Wir woll'n das Wort nicht brechen, p. 40

9. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 412

10. Schutter, Fritz, Wir woll'n das Wort nicht brechen, p. 164

11. Buchner, Peter, Die Kriegserinnerungen des Werner Schmieder, p. 12

12. Mathias, Karl Heinz, Ich diene, p. 65

13. Schulze-Kossens, Militärischer Führernachwuchs der Waffen SS, p. 45

14. Springer, Heinrich, Stationen eines Lebens in Krieg und Frieden, p. 53

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16. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 412

17. Schulze-Kossens, Militärischer Führernachwuchs der Waffen SS, p.33

18. Jestadt, Georg, Ohne Siege und Hurra, p. 168

19. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 423

20. Miiata, Paul, Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu, pp. 48, 175, 214

21. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 186

22. Degrelle, Leon, Erinnerungen eines europäischen Kriegsfreiwilliger, p. 182

23. Levsen, Dirk, Krieg im Norden, p. 11

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25. Pedersen, Henry, Germanische Freiwillige, p. 18

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29. Verton, Hendrik, Im Feuer der Ostfront, pp. 47, 39

30. Uhle-Wettler, Franz, Höhe und Wendepunkte deutscher Militärgeschichte, pp. 267, 290

31. Dokumente britisch-französischer Grausamkeit, p. 140

32. Kern, Erich, Adolf Hitler und der Krieg, p. 120

33. Meiser, Hans, Das Ringen um Frankreich, p. 297

34. Post, Walter, Hitlers Europa, p. 387

35. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 121

36. Germanisches Leitheft 1/1941, p. 8

37. Halfeld, August, USA im Krieg, p. 7

38. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, pp. 72, 74

39. NS Monatshefte Nr. 126, p. 546

40. Gehl, Walther, Die Sendung des Reiches, pp. 97-98

41. Germanisches Leitheft 8/9, 1942, p. 346

42. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 50

43. Pedersen, Henry, Germanische Freiwillige, p. 25

44. DuPrel, Max Freiherr, Die Niederlande im Umbruch der Zeiten, p. 58

45. Seidler, Franz, Avantgarde für Europa, p. 57

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48. Horn, Martin, Norwegen zwischen Krieg und Frieden, p. 17

49. Meissner, Gustav, Danemark unterm Hakenkreuz, p. 478. Pedersen, Henry, Germanische Freiwillige, p. 192

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53. Seidler, Franz, Avantgarde für Europa, p. 84

54. Post, Walter, Hitlers Europa, p. 21

55. Boberach, Heinz, Meldungen aus dem Reich, p. 2483

56. Pedersen, Henry, Germanische Freiwillige, p. 37

57. Seidler, Franz, Avantgarde für Europa, p. 48

58. Werther, Steffen, Dänische Freiwillige in der Waffen SS, p. 72

59. Boberach, Heinz, Meldungen aus dem Reich, pp. 2484-2485

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61. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 62

62. Seidler, Franz, Avantgarde für Europa, p. 132

63. Schweiger, Herbert, Mythos Waffen SS, p. 70

64. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 245

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71. Jestadt, Georg, Ohne Siege und Hurra, p. 52

72. Umbreit, Hans, Deutsche Militärverwaltungen 1938/39, pp. 199, 198

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82. Picker, Henry, Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier, p. 214

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84. Seidler, Franz, Die Wehrmacht im Partisanenkrieg, p. 84

85. Hoffmann, Joachim, Stalins Vernichtungskrieg, p. 97

86. Buchbender, Ortwin, Schuh, Horst, Die Waffe, die auf die Seelezielt, p. 120

87. Post, Walter, Die verleumdete Armee, p. 193

88. Seidler, Franz, Die Wehrmacht im Partisanenkrieg, pp. 117-118

89. Becker, Fritz, Kampf um Europa, pp. 293-294

90. Post, Walter, Die verleumdete Armee, p. 185

91. Hoffmann, Joachim, Stalins Vernichtungskrieg, p. 245

92. Wimmer, Josef, Ich war dabei, p. 115

93. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 138-139

94. Gieler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, p. 399

95. Schwarz, Hanns, Brennpunkt FHQ, p. 65

96. Degrelle, Leon, Erinnerungen eines europäischen Kriegsfreiwilliger, p. 122

97. Ochsenreiter, Manual, Deutsche Militärzeitschrift: Sonderausgabe Waffen SS, p. 70

98. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, p. 62

99. Schweiger, Herbert, Mythos Waffen SS, p. 67

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102. Schwarz, Hanns, Brennpunkt FHQ, p. 65

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23

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112. Schweiger, Herbert, Mythos Waffen SS, pp. 55-56

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114. Frey, Albert, Ich wollte die Freiheit, p. 247

115. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 467

116. Seidler, Franz, Avantgarde für Europa, p. 27

117. Schwarz, Hanns, Brennpunkt FHQ, p. 67

118. Gordon, Helmut, Es spricht: Der Führer, p. 27

119. Frey, Albert, Ich wollte die Freiheit, p. 90

120. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 413

121. Schulze-Kossens, Militärischer Führernachwuchs der Waffen SS, p. 231

122. Höhne, Heinz, Die Orden unter dem Totenkopf, p. 444

Chapter 6

1. Ellenbeck, Hans, Die Verantwortung des deutschen Offiziers, p. 26

2. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 25-26

3. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p.146

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5. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 27, 37

6. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 171

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8. Kunert, Dirk, Deutschland im Krieg der Kontinente, p. 218

9. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 171

10. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 62

11. Klüver, Max, Es war nicht Hitlers Krieg, p. 175

12. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 199

13. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 234

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16. Ribbentrop, Annelies von, Die Kriegsschuld des Widerstandes, p. 385

17. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 30

18. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 252

19. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat um Hitler, p. 48

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23. Schellenberg, Walter, Hitlers lezter Geheimdienstchef, p. 117

24. Dönitz, Karl, Zehn Jahre und Zwanzig Tage, p. 247

25. Meiser, Hans, Gescheiterte Friedens-Initiativen 1939-1945, p. 191

26. Sudholt, Gert, So war der Zweite Weltkrieg 1940, p. 146

27. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 132

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29. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p.

425

30. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 104-105

31. Ribbentrop, Rudolf von, Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 288

32. Schmolke, Heinz, Die Entscheidungsschlacht, p. 10

33. Mein Vater Joachim von Ribbentrop, p. 289

34. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, PP. 66-67

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38. Pemler, Georg, Der Flug zum Don, p. 79

39. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p.67

40. Pemler, Georg, Der Flug zum Don, p. 84

41. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 79

42. Schramm, Wilhelm von, Aufstand der Generale, pp. 38, 209

43. Klapdor, Ewald, Der Ostfeldzug 1941, pp. 83, 116, 117

44. Schellenberg, Walter, Hitlers letzter Geheimdienstchef, p. 253

45. Musial, Bognan, Kampfplatz Deutschland, p. 459

46. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 158

47. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 162

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49. Haupt, Werner, Kiew, p. 21

50. Giesler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, pp. 427, 429

51. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, pp. 165, 170, 172

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55. Below, Nicolaus von, Als Hitlers Adjutant, p. 295

56. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 223, 224

57. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 186

58. Haupt, Werner, Die Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Mitte, p. 125

59. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 186

60. Giesler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, p. 426

61. Sudholt, Gerhard, So war derZweite Weltkrieg 1942, p. 113

62. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p 230

63. Magenheimer, Heinz, Hitler's War, p.140

64. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 279

65. Zürner, Bernhard, Hitler Feldherr wider Willen, p. 154

66. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 288

67. Meiser, Hans, So wurde Stalingrad verraten, p. 158

68. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat uni Hitler, p. 180

69. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, pp. 306-307, 311

70. Pemler, Georg, Der Flug zum Don, p. 169

71. Meiser, Hans, So wurde Stalingrad verraten, p.215

72. Uhle-Wetter, Franz, Höhe und Wendepunkte deutscher Militärgeschichte, p. 362

73. Meiser, Hans, So wurde Stalingrad verraten, p.207

74. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 260

75. Uhle-Wetter, Franz, Höhe und Wendepunkte deutscher Militärgeschichte, p.362

76. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 323

77. Meiser, Hans, So wurde Stalingrad verraten, pp.219-220

78. Schmolke, Heinz, Die Entscheidungsschlacht, p. 9

79. Uhle-Wetter, Franz, Höhe und Wendepunkte deutscher Militärgeschichte, p. 382

80. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 406

81. Zürner, Bernhard, Hitler Feldherr wider Willen, p.173

82. Pfötsch, Kurt, Die Hölle von Kursk, p. 97

83. Brunnegger, Herbert, Saat in den Sturm, pp. 228, 230

84. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 233-234

85. Meiser, Hans, So wurde Stalingrad verraten, p. 246

86. Buchner, Alex, Ostfront 1944, p. 147

87. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 233

88. Haupt, Werner, Die Schlachten der Heeresgruppe Mitte, p. 272

89. inze, Rolf, Ostfront 1944, p. 37

90. Schramm, Wilhelm von, Aufstand der Generale, p. 29

91. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p.155

92. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, pp. 201, 204, 203

93. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 155

94. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, pp. 17, 207

95. Schellenberg, Walter, Hitlers lezter Geheimdienstchef, p. 348

96. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 32

97. Ibid, p. 126

98. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 28

99. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 57

100. Zimmermann, R. Heinz, Der Atlantikwall, p. 20

101. Griesser, Volker, Die Löwen von Carentan, p. 86

102. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 180

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104. Schramm, Wilhelm von, Aufstand der Generale, p. 25

105. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 129

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111. Carrell, Paul, Invasion—They're Coming!, p. 122

112. Widmann, Franz, Mit Totenkopf und Frundsberg an Ost-und Westfront, p. 150

113. Tieke, Wilhelm, Im Feuersturm letzter Kriegsjahre, p. 114

114. Ritgen, Helmut, Die Geschichte der Panzer-Lehr-Division im Westen, p. 102

115. Post, Walter, Hitlers Europa, p. 466

116. Schmolke, Heinz, Die Entscheidungsschlacht, pp. 32, 36, 37

117. Klapdor, Ewald Die Entscheidung, p. 165

118. Schmolke, Heinz, Die Entscheidungsschlacht, pp. 45, 46

119. lapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, p. 164

120. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 86

121. Speidel, Hans, Invasion 1944, p. 99

122. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 87

123. Sauders, Hrowe, Der verratene Sieg, p. 129

124. Klapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, pp. pp. 136-137

125. Meyer, Hubert, Kriegsgeschichte der 12.SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend, p. 62

126. Jestadt, Georg, Ohne Siege und Hurra, pp. 138-140

127. Jestadt, Georg, Ohne Siege und Hurra, pp. 138-140

128. Schmolke, Heinz, Die Entscheidungsschlacht, p. 65

129. Ritgen, Helmut, Die Geschichte der Panzer-Lehr-Division im Westen, p. 105

130. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie,, p. 97

131. Klapdor, Ewald,, Die Entscheidung, p. 172

132. Carell, Paul, Invasion-They're Coming!, p. 122

133. Klapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, p. 125

134. Irving, David, Rommel, p. 494

135. Henning, Otto, Als Panzer-und Spähtruppführer in der Panzer-Lehr-Division, pp.15-16

136. Klapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, p. 127

137. Ibid, p. 121

138. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 236

139. Klapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, p. 127

140. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, pp. 248, 112

141. Misch, Rochus, Der letzte Zeuge, p. 164

142. Henning, Otto, Als Panzer-und Spähtruppführer in der Panzer-Lehr-Division, pp.15-16

143. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 18143. Ibid, p. 236

144. Nardini, Walther, Cassino, p. 311

145. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat in der Normandie, p. 313

146. Klapdor, Ewald, Die Entscheidung, p. 150

147. Oven, Wilfred von, Finale Furioso, p. 401

148. Landhoff, Werner, Die Opfer des 20. Juli 1944, p. 36

149. Oven, Wilfred von, Finale Furioso, p. 402

150. Schaub, Julius, In Hitlers Schatten, p. 266

151. Georg, Friedrich, Verrat an der Ostfront, p. 87

152. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat um Hitler, pp. 36, 51

153. Schramm, Wilhelm von, Aufstand der Generale, pp. 125, 114

154. Landhoff, Werner, Die Opfer des 20. Juli 1944, p. 115

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160. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat um Hitler, p. 27

161. Adam, Günther, Ich habe meine Pflicht erfüllt, p. 294

162. Hinze, Rolf, Ostfront 1944 p. 17

163. Below, Nicolaus von, Als Hitlers Adjutant, p. 358

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165. Oven, Wilfred von, Finale Furioso, p. 450

166. Giesler, Hermann, Ein anderer Hitler, p. 442

167. Martin, Hans-Leo, Unser Mann bei Goebbels, p. 68

168. Oven, Wilfred von, Finale Furioso, p. 450

169. Landhoff, Werner, Die Opfer des 20. Juli 1944, p. 219

170. Kern, Erich, Adolf Hitler und der Krieg, p. 400

171. Jordan, Rudolf, Erlebt und erlitten, p. 239

172. Kern, Erich, Adolf Hitler und der Krieg, p. 403

173. Schramm, Wilhelm von, Aufstand der Generale, p. 24

174. Meiser, Hans, Gescheiterte Friedens-Initiativen 1939-1945, p. 268

175. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 64

176. Kurowski, Franz, Bedingungslose Kapitulation, pp. 61, 11

177. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 318

178. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat um Hitler, p. 65

179. Landhoff, Werner, Die Opfer des 20. Juli 1944, p. 220

180. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 320

181. Günther, Helmut, Von der Hitler-Jugend zur Waffen SS, p. 228

182. Meiser, Hans, Gescheiterte Friedens-Initiativen 1939-1945, p. 273

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185. Klüver, Max, Die Kriegstreiber, p. 375

186. Bieg, Hans-Henning, Amerika die unheimliche Weltmacht, p. 69

187. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 124

188. Offiziere des Führers, 6/1944, PP. 12-13

189. Post, Walter, Hitlers Europa, p. 374

190. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 269

191. Paul, Wolfgang, Der Heimatkrieg, p. 384

192. Hoffmann, Joachim, Stalins Vernichtungskrieg, p. 292

193. Kurowski, Franz, Bedingungslose Kapitulation, p. 181

194. Adam, Günther, Ich habe meine Plicht erfüllt, pp. 355-356, 358

195. Kurowski, Franz, Bedingungslose Kapitulation, p. 66

196. Paul, Wolfgang, Der Heimatkrieg, p. 191

197. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, p. 265

198. Czesany, Maximilian, Allierter Bombenterror, p.348

199. Schwarz, Hanns, Brennpunkt FHQ, pp. 40-41 Ibid, pp. 192-195

200. Remer, Otto Ernst, Verschwörung und Verrat um Hitler, p. 324

201. Meiser, Hans, Verratene Verräter, pp. 104, 143

202. Hahl, Fritz, Mit Westland im Osten, p. 161

203. Grimm, Friedrich, Mit offenem Visier, pp. 248-249

204. Neulen, Hans Werner, Europa und das 3. Reich, pp. 150-151

205. Below, Nicolaus von, Als Hitlers Adjutant, p. 208

206. Klüver, Max, Vom Klassenkampf zur Volksgemeinschaft, p. 186

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209. ffiziere des Führers, 5/1944, p. 23

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